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THE CHILDHOOD OF JESUS

by

GERALDINE CUMMINS

Preface by Eric ParkerForeword by Rev. A. H. E. Lee, M.A. (Oxon)

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To H. L. G.

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PREFACE

This is a beautiful book. I do not know in what way it came into being, but I should describe it as a sort of vision, with a strange light illuminating the narrative, which carries the reader into unexpected trains of thought and into a sort of unearthly travelling into unknown places. Thus the idea of Jesus being an unskilled carpenter cuts across what perhaps may be called the conventions of tradition, and the journeying of Jesus with Heli and the desert tribe owes nothing in its conception to anything I have read anywhere else.



The Childhood of Jesus - Frederic Myers via Geraldine Cummins FREE ebook

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I do not know whether the writer has been in Palestine, but I feel sure that anyone who has will recognise the atmosphere, and yet you will feel that there is what I can only call a kind of other world about all the region in which the action takes place. Yet the characters are intensely human; they live and move and have their being, as separate men and women, behaving as we should expect them to behave when we have come to know them. Of the central Figure, I think the first feeling I have had is of His loveliness, and it is that sense of loveliness that creates beauty in the book. But the language too, is strangely beautiful, and speaking as one who has read many books, and has advised publishers on the merits of manuscripts, I should say that this book would appeal to a large public.

ERIC PARKER

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FOREWORD

by

Rev. A. H. E. Lee, M.A.

There are, it may be said, some silences that are more eloquent than words: and in the Gospel narrative perhaps the most notable is the long stretch of silence in the life of Christ between His early visit to the Temple and His reaching the age of thirty. It is impressive, but only as a fact. Nothing can be proved or disproved from it. We are confronted by the strange circumstance that He who of all humanity perhaps needed least preparation seems to have had most. We are left to judge whether or not this was due to some mode of the divine humility, or whether the evangelists here (and in the case of the risen Lazarus) were inwardly guided to abstain from writing.

The Script which follows fills not unworthily the gap left by the Canonical Gospels. The difficulties, trials and waverings of the Virgin Mother are sympathetically treated. Joseph, no longer the somewhat shadowy figure disappearing so quickly from the Gospel narrative, comes to life, without any attempt on the writer's part, to glorify or belittle his character. The Boy is the true father of the Man: such an incident as that related on p. 178 might easily be the germ of the concluding part of the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Exactly who Mary Clopas was has never been quite settled by the critics, but she may quite well have been Joseph's sister. Certain readers may resent the idea that the Blessed Virgin bore other children after the First born. But theologians are still divided between the (Helvidian) theory, that the 'brethren' were later sons of Joseph and Mary, and the (Epiphanian) theory that they were sons of Joseph by an earlier marriage; and no final verdict has been given.

It might be said that the interviews with Sichem, the Pharisee, shew precociousness not quite in harmony with the Gospel narrative: but the story is by no means incredible. The steady faith of Mary Clopas the friendly Sichem-the wandering beggar Heli-the timid James-the aged Zireeta-the Tribe of the Wanderers-the strange (but by no means improbable) friendship between Annas and Quirinius-all these combine in forming an appropriate background to the growth in wisdom and stature of the central Figure. We notice the gradual formation of those habits of retirement into mountain or forest which are so clearly marked in the Gospel story. We see the petty persecutions-the misunderstandings and jealousies-beginning here, which culminated in the rejection of the Prophet by the people of Nazareth and their attempt to kill him.

One quotation may suffice. Leah, child of Joseph and Mary, is dangerously ill. Heli the wanderer, who has taught the young Nazarene something of the healing art, says: " 'Go now to Nazareth. Turn neither to the right nor to the left, but travel swiftly to thy father's house. Thou mayest smite the evil. Thou art in the measure of the melody that floweth from the Great Power. One counsel I give thee. Be not afraid. Fear is nothing but the betrayal of the succour offered by the Spirit. Be not roused to wrath, be not stirred by grief. Let not any wind of passion penetrate thine understanding. For the shaken mind and body cannot serve the Great Power.' Jesus bowed His head . . . and vanished. And the strange wanderer . . . murmured: 'if he but knew. Already he is master, already the Spirit gathereth about him with a power that never gathered about me. . . . Pure as no other is

pure. Innocent as no other is innocent. Will he ever remain thus unspotted by the world?'" (p. 166).

The narrative flows smoothly and easily onwards; and these pages breathe the calm atmosphere of the Galilean countryside while the strong arm of Rome kept the world at peace. Youth and its problems are very much in the air today. This book should be specially welcome to all who would know something of the early training of One who loved the young.

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CHAPTER I

In the time when the Jews were much vexed in spirit because of the yoke of the Romans, a young fisherman and his wife dwelt on the shores of the sea of Galilee. These two, the man of ships and nets and the maid he had taken to wife were simple of soul and cared but for one another, not seeking the company of their neighbours or of their own kin. They were sufficient unto themselves and well content to live to themselves.

Out of their great love was born a child whom they named Mary, and for a space she rejoiced their hearts. But as the years passed no more children were given to them, and the fisherman sorrowed because he feared that his name would not endure; inasmuch as no son was his. Therefore he lost his joy in his wife and in his life of peaceful labour upon the waters.

In the presence of the growing child he spoke of his sorrow to her mother and to Zireeta, his own mother who dwelt in his house. And Mary, the maid, was troubled in soul because she feared that in some way she had erred, that she was the cause of her father's heaviness of spirit. So she spoke to the old woman, saying: I have displeased my father, for I am no son to him, and how may I comfort him?"

The old woman answered: "Thou canst not change what hath been written. Behold, thy father yearneth for a son who will break the yoke of the Romans, free God's people and raise Israel above all the nations of the earth."

And when Mary questioned Zireeta further she spoke of a man who would be a horn of salvation, who would wrest the Holy City from its conquerors and make of the Jews a great people.

"Then I may not serve because I am a maid?" asked Mary, her countenance shewing her heaviness of heart. Zireeta kissed her, smiling and saying: "Strange are the ways of the Lord, hidden His purpose. Peradventure when thou art grown thou wilt bear a son who will be greater than Judas Maccabeus, who will be a prophet and a light to lighten the Gentiles; causing them to bow down before the God of Israel. Verily, no man in his generation can tell what marvel may arise in some future time through the woman who hath been chosen to bear a son."

Mary had but small understanding of the words of the old woman, but they made her well content. From henceforth she was the most joyful among the children who played upon the shores of the sea of Galilee. She followed the custom of her parents, and did not seek the company of those of her kin or generation, abiding with her mother.

As the seasons passed the old grief faded from the mind of the fisherman. He declared that it was the will of God that his desire for a son should not be granted. So these four who dwelt together joyed in the present hour. And it would seem that in other matters God had blessed them abundantly, for the fisherman prospered. Such was his skill, his nets were weighty with silver fish, that when sold by him, brought money that gave increase and prosperous days.

They dwelt in a land of sunshine and of flowers. No angry bitterness of winter smote them,

no sun burned up their garden in the warm season, for it was plenteously watered. They had all that they desired, and Mary grew in stature and in grace, opening as a flower in that happy time. The hours sped as swiftly as a weaver's shuttle, her mother sang as she worked about the house and the old woman murmured prayers of thanksgiving for the great wonder and joy of such love and prosperity. Other men and women were troubled either by poverty or by their own quarrels and little cares, but these two children of hers-

the fisherman and his wife-now were ever of one mind, bound to each other by their love, their sweetness of soul and understanding.

However, there came a day in early winter when the vines were withered and the sun was cold; so that the winds became powerful. And after the fisherman embarked on his boat they swept down from the hills across the lake. In one short hour the whole face of the waters was changed. It was as if many invisible husbandmen traversed that sea, beating it with flails, causing the foam to leap and hiss, the waves to spring angrily towards the heavens.

The fisherman's boat was ancient and had little holes in it through which the water flowed. Even so it laboured bravely while the women watched from the land. But there came a fierce wind from the mountain that, swooping like a hawk, pounced upon the hapless ship, thrusting it forward, driving its sails into the boisterous waves. Dark were the skies; black rain swept across the face of the sea, no eye could perceive the fishing vessels any more from the shore.

Swiftly dusk fell, night gathering thick and heavy upon the groaning earth. And the women assembled together, mourning, lamenting, praying for the men upon the sea now hidden from their sight. Neither moon nor stars lightened the dreary hours. No comfort came, no sign was given until at last the dawn peered wanly over the eastern hills, bearing to those stricken souls a little hope, a belief that, perhaps, their prayers were to be answered, and all would be saved.

Many were the thanksgivings when the wind fell with the risen day and fishermen came to shore. But they bore with them sorrowful tidings. The vessel of Zireeta's son had sunk beneath the waves in the dusk of the day that was past.

Stillness fell upon the waters as the sun climbed higher in the heavens; and when noon came, rest was wholly theirs. They sparkled as the starshine, as the glimmering dust which God walks upon as He traverses the wide heavens.

In this joyful hour when the world smiled once again, five men bore a heavy burden to the house in which dwelt Mary and her mother. Silently they bent their heads, passing into the small dim room beyond. And they laid the stricken body of the fisherman upon a linen sheet that was spread by the old woman upon the ground.

The mother of Mary was seized by a great quaking, which made the child fearful as she watched, and caused her to tremble, lament and bow her little head. But no one heeded the child; for the mother fell to the earth, lying heavy and still beside her husband.

They had loved as no man and woman in Galilee had ever loved before. One in spirit and in understanding, the Kingdom of Heaven was theirs while still they abode upon the earth. So now for the mother of Mary there was only darkness and a mighty despair.

These two, the fisherman and his beloved, were strong as the young trees of the forest. Yet, in one season, both were smitten. After her husband's going her spirit soon fled from the darkness of the body and the old woman prepared spices and the wrappings of the grave for her two children who had thus been snatched from her and from their sweet days of labour and content.

They were laid in a tomb shaped from the rock, a burial place that was open to the sky. Few were the mourners, and swiftly was their task accomplished, their burden laid to rest. They went about their trades and crafts once again. For them the chronicle of the fisherman and his wife was ended; but for the little one it still endured. After the burial she came to the old woman, hiding her face in the folds of her garments, praying her to call back the mother and father who had been taken away.

And the old woman sought to comfort Mary, saying that God was her Father and that she would be her mother. But for a space no kindness could stay or silence the lamentations of the child.

CHAPTER II

The house and little garden were sold. Zireeta and Mary journeyed to Nazareth where they dwelt in a herdsman's hut in the fields.

The Galileans were a kindly folk; and from time to time they bore gifts to Zireeta-a share of figs one clay, a small fish on another, a measure of wheat when harvest came and the reapers were abroad upon the slopes of the hills.

The fisherman had laid by in a napkin a small store of money, so though the old woman and the maid were poor there was sufficient for their needs. The pains of age increased, Zireeta could no longer walk abroad. And with each new sunrise the day seemed darker for her than the comrade it followed. When a bright noon pierced the huts and caves with its spears of light she fumbled and sought her way wearily and with hardship. For sight as well as power were passing, and there came a sunrise that for her was night.

She did not grieve because these other afflictions fell upon her. As in the prosperous days she gave thanks for the many blessings the Lord bestowed upon the household.

The maid, who stayed much with her, was tempted in an evil hour and cried out: "Wherefore should we render praise when all we love is reft from us, when thou art sightless and cannot even with heavy labour raise thyself and walk to the threshold of our dwelling?"

And Zireeta spoke gently to the child, declaring that there was a purpose in such affliction. From tribulation sprang joy and triumph. Had not the people of Israel suffered many things at the hands of the Egyptians? Had they not endured, receiving in a later season the promised land rich in wheat, milk and honey? Mary was quieted by these words and prayed the old woman to tell her more of the ancient days.

In the gloom of that small room, many tales were related to Mary of the mighty dead. Marvellous were the sayings of the blind woman to the maid, and it seemed at times that the shadows were moved about her, that David, the unarmed youth, stood before her with his sling, that the giant of the Philistines thrust his great shape from out the dimness, filling, that small dwelling, and falling before the stone of the thrower. Though she had never departed from Galilee, Mary could perceive as she hearkened, the Temple with the golden roof raised in such glory at Jerusalem. She learned of the battles fought with the Philistines and with the Babylonians, of the many sorrows of Israel, of the many captivities. One by one the prophets passed before her gaze-Isaiah, Jeremiah, Elias and many another strange men with flowing robes and noble countenances; and all spoke of that deliverer of Israel who would be born of a virgin.

The conquest of the Greeks, the later shame of the people of Judaea, was recounted in burning words by the ancient woman who rested with her head upon her hand in that small, bare chamber. In her youth she had hearkened to the village scribes, and so, for Mary, the chamber lost its emptiness and became a glory, a place of illumination and delight in which she spun her dreams.

Great was Israel's need, as the Romans now ruled in the place of the Greeks; and they sought ever to lead away and corrupt the faithful. They dishonoured and defiled the Holy City of Zion. Mary asked of the old woman out of what town or village would spring the deliverer, who would be chosen as the mother of the Messiah? Perhaps the prophets had declared her name and tribe? But Zireeta could not tell of the root from which he would spring. She knew not whether there were any tidings of him even now in these latter days at Jerusalem. And with such an answer Mary must needs be content.

Since her father's passing she had been fearful as a young faun in the forest. She would not seek out others of her generation, and did not speak with the older women when they came to the hut with a gift, or to pass the hours in talk with Zireeta. The heavy sorrow that had smitten the maid so harshly now no more caused her pain or led her to weep quietly in the corner of the hearth. For out of the old woman's tales she was building a noble vision, plucking at the heart of the years to come, dowering them with a son who would be the conqueror of the Romans, the Redeemer of her own people.

One day she asked Zireeta if God would grant her desire when it was not for herself but for the people of Judeo.

The old woman answered: "If thou dost pray daily for it and kept thyself pure and apart

from others, peradventure God will grant thy request. The prophets went alone into the wilderness when they sought some special grace. Do thou withdraw thyself into thy corner by the hearth and pray for our people. Truly, as my neighbour sayeth, they have need of it."

Now Mary would not declare her dream even to Zireeta; for it would seem soiled when laid before the understanding of another. Only in the hours when she wandered in the fields

did she pray aloud, declaring her desire to God.

The neighbours spoke to the old woman: "Mary is no more a child. Let her seek the company of our daughters and learn to be as others, for it is not well that she should always abide apart and in dimness."

So Zireeta bade Mary go forth and not stay with her through all the hours, for she was content and would have tidings of the village and the people. These Mary might bear her if she came and went.

And Mary was glad to be thus free. Winter had passed, spring decked the hills with many coloured blossoms. Vines cast forth their young shoots, the trees were being appareled in green garments; and the earth and birds were stirring in all places, the great heart of life beating swiftly everywhere. Mary went gaily forth each day after she had attended upon the old woman. Yet she did not seek the company of the neighbours, but climbed the hills, staying nowhere until she was wholly alone. Then, when no eye gazed upon her, she sought the shade of some tree, kneeling and praying beneath it for the great yearning of her soul, for that heart's desire first set within her by the words of her father.

Many times she watched the sun rising, the cool dusk of morning passing, the birds wheeling in the light. And gladness ever possessed her spirit; for she now came to believe that she was chosen, that she would, in due season, be the mother of the Messiah.

In that wondrous springtime this dream was woven out of sunshine and of flowers. In the blue water of Galilee it was imaged. From the snow crowned mountains in the north, from the smiling coasts came belief, hope and a sureness that would not be denied. If God could shape such an earth He could assuredly grant Mary's dream. All things for Him were possible. So she believed, and so she continued to grow in such belief. Therefore, men and women, youths and maidens were to her but as shadows. They played no part in her                            <img alt="purple diamond" data-bbox="147

evening, while birds, beasts and children ceased their crying, seeking sleep. The night was still, no voice calling, no step causing the stones without to murmur and mutter when at last she who was blind perceived with a greater clearness than her neighbours, than any Galilean. "Peradventure, little daughter," she said, "thou wilt be chosen. Thou speakest from thy heart, and it may be that the angel of the Lord will appear unto thee if thou doest continue in this high purpose. Tell no one of it, but go thy ways as before and heed

So Mary did not change the ordering of her days. When she encountered the goodwives in the winding streets they bade her to their houses, but she would not enter, breaking from them. Then they were angered, reproaching the old woman who would not command the comings in and goings out of the maid. Nay more, they spoke evil of her vigils upon the hills; and the children hearkened, and in their turn, spoke evil, designing to make a mock and show of one of their generation who walked apart from them.

"She is scornful and proud," they declared, as they watched her passing up the winding street.

"Let us make sport of her," cried a maid whose age was greater than Mary's by more than two summers.

"Yea, we will humble her and cause her to bow her head," cried another.

Whereupon the children and the young women followed her, calling out base sayings, casting dust and mud at the maid. She turned herself about, gazing down upon these Galileans from the slope on which she stood, uttering no word, wonder and fear upon her countenance.

Then they were the more emboldened because she seemed afraid, and they might have dealt hardly with her if their cries had not been silenced by the voice of a youth.

A young carpenter named Joseph came between these tormentors and their prey, commanding their silence, saying: "Ye disgrace our town. Behold the maid who hath neither father nor mother and hurteth no living soul. But ye do make a mock and a shame of her because she walketh alone, because she is holy."

"Holy?" cried one.

"Yea, holy," declared Joseph. "My sister hath watched Mary when she is alone in the fields; and she hath told me that this maid maketh long prayers and is truly an example to us all, seeking to serve the Holy Name, and, in her way to fulfill His will. For, verily, I believe she hath been set apart for some high purpose."

Then these women and children were abashed and cast about, and they withdrew muttering, scolding and whispering; for they feared the young carpenter, and his words caused them to be ashamed.

The sister of Joseph alone had learned Mary's secret dream, and she had imparted it to her brother. When in his sister's company, he sought to speak with the maid; and she was ashamed and scarce would utter any words. Fearing to destroy her peace, Joseph sought no more to converse with her, but watched her when she walked abroad alone.

Though still talk was made the neighbours did not again trouble Mary. And indeed the time of her sojourn in Nazareth was now only for a short season.

One day, when Mary had been early abroad, she returned to a dwelling that seemed empty though Zireeta sat beside the fire. As the maid traversed the threshold some stranger passed her by. Such in truth was her belief, yet she saw no one. And fear gathered heavily in that dim chamber, joy fleeing as life had fled.

Mary went to the old woman, touching her closed eyes, her feet and hands, and in that instant knew that she was dead.

CHAPTER IV

The store of money had been spent. It was time for Zireeta to pass from the weary life of the flesh. But now Mary had no friends among the neighbours. Only the youth Joseph and his sister showed kindness, speaking words of comfort, succouring her in this lonely hour.

They were poor, but they sought out her kin. And in the week that followed the death of Zireeta, a grey bearded man, one named Chiraeus passed through Nazareth. He was a cousin of the dead woman and declared to Mary that he was prepared to take her into his service. His wife was old and had no children. They kept an inn on the road to Jerusalem, and it was needful that they should have some handmaid who would share in the labour of the household.

Then Mary bade farewell to the hills she so dearly loved, and to the two friends who had not, as the others, withdrawn from her in her hour of sorrow.

The inn, which now was home for Mary, was set in a valley and stood alone near to the road along which travelers, merchants and pilgrims journey when they go to Jerusalem. In certain seasons few passed by that way; but at the time of the great feasts the inn was crowded, and Mary laboured early and late, sleeping in such times in the stable near her cousin's abode. She served the guests and swept the house. And her hearing was greeted by the sounds of diverse tongues, by tales of other lands and of strange hazardous ventures. All these she wove into the texture of her dreams.

Often the house was empty but for Chiraeus and the housewife. Only at times in the evenings did the shepherds gather within it from the hills. And Mary served these rude, heavy men and delighted to hearken to their speech concerning sheep and shearing, battles fought by them and by their dogs with the wolves; tales of pestilence that scourged the flocks, tales of robbers.

All these she harvested within her mind. Only from among them did she pluck one tale-as a harper plucks at one string-the chronicle of a prophet and a king who would be born of the Royal House of David and who would deliver Israel from the invader.

"Lo, in the night time, when the bitter wind scourged the hills and I had folded my flock," declared one young shepherd, "there came a change in the skies, blackness fled, and we who were huddled about the fire of roots, trembled and were troubled in soul, yet glad, and we knew not the cause of our gladness. We questioned one another, saying: 'Behold, this is but the first hour of the night and already dawn appelleth the hills with light. Hath God changed the hours? Doth He summon the sun out of the east in winter time, at the darkest hour, when it would seem that night alone is monarch and ruler of the world?'

"No man could answer such questions; all withdrew into silence, huddling closer over the fire, not seeking sleep, watching and scarce breathing as the light withdrew from the borders of those hills, yet did not fade, increasing in brilliance and in beauty. Soon it spread about a shape; and that shape stood over against the darkness behind the dying fire.

"Fear fell upon us all. For we are simple men of the hills and have little understanding of the marvels of the earth. But truly this was no earthly marvel. For, in a short space, a voice came from out that shape of light, that starry being who would seem to have cleft the skies and dropped down within our midst upon the earth.

"'I am the Angel of God,' declared this Shining One; 'and I bear tidings of joy to Israel. Behold, a woman hath been chosen from among the people of the Lord, and it is written that she shall bear a child who, when he is grown, shall rule over all men, holding 'neath his sway Romans, Greeks and Gentiles; and they shall bow the knee to Israel.'

"So marvellous was this speech, so peaceful the mien of this Being who came from out the fiery heights of Heaven, we were emboldened, and bowing ourselves down we shepherds spake with one voice, entreating the angel to guide us to the virgin who was to bear the deliverer of Israel. And behold, even as we cried the light faded, the angel vanished. We were alone with the darkness and the bitter wind; and even our small fire was quenched.

"Since that night we have watched again and yet again for the angel, but it cometh not; and we are heavy of heart. For we would find the mother of the deliverer of Israel."

 However, the innkeeper could give them no counsel in such a matter. He but pressed more of the thin wine of the land upon them. And after a short space the shepherds departed, seeking their flocks upon the hills.

And Mary gathered within her understanding this tale of the angel, also weaving it into her dream. Nightly was that dream shaped in a prayer that she spoke when she was at last alone and might declare her desire to God.

CHAPTER V

Now the inn was set in a barren place, no great journey from Jerusalem. Truly the face of that region seemed as the countenance of some old bald head which is scored and

wrinkled, scourged by the furies of life and time. Only in spring did any green things show themselves, and that but sparsely. Soon the grasses drooped and died. With summer these rocky valleys and clifted hills were stripped of plant and flower, and the eyes of men were greeted only with the bare and pitiless stones that burned the feet with the coming of the noonday sun.

Mary might well have pined and drooped when compelled to live in the midst of such harshness; and at times her spirit yearned for the vine clad slopes of Galilee, for the rich blossom of that land, for the peace of the deep blue waters of the lake. Yet she was content because her dream grew and increased in loveliness.

In the season of harvest the innkeeper made great preparation and caused his housewife and handmaid to scour the house; for he deemed that many pilgrims would soon pass by that way, journeying to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Tabernacles.

It was a year when the hearts and minds of many Jews were turned towards the Holy City of Zion. So the belief of the innkeeper was fulfilled. Travelers passed by that way in great numbers; and Mary and the housewife served them, labouring early and late. Among them were certain Jews who had come from a far land that lay beyond the Euphrates.

They smiled upon Mary and desired that she should serve them. They were not as other pilgrims, but wore costly robes. So their host sought to do the strangers honour, and the maid bore meat and wine in haste, setting them before each grey beard.

And as they ate their fill they spoke with one another, saying: "Peradventure, we shall see Herod, the king, at Jerusalem, and he may lighten the darkness of our ignorance."

Whereupon the innkeeper inquired of them as to their purpose in this pilgrimage, and as to the knowledge they sought to acquire from a ruler who was not held in any great esteem by the faithful.

One white bearded sage said: "We have learned that the hour of the birth of the Messiah is at hand. We have seen the star that heraldeth His coming and we would find Him out and pay Him homage."

"And where shall he be found?" asked the innkeeper.

"The prophet hath declared that Bethlehem is chosen as His birthplace. 'Thou, Bethlehem, art not the least among the cities of Judaea.' So it hath been written. 'Wherefore, we would seek Him there.'

"Nay, not in Bethlehem," spoke another bearded stranger. "Masters, ye are wise men. Wherefore should the King of Israel thus be born in a small city, without the knowledge of the people?"

And a third said: "His birthplace shall be unknown. Nay more, His father and His mother, peradventure, shall not be known."

"But His father shall be of the seed of David," cried another.

Whereupon these wise men fell at strife, contending in fierce words concerning the coming of the King. The whitebearded sage wearied of their clacking tongues and drew apart from them, softly calling the maid. "Wisdom is oftentimes declared by the babe or the innocent," he said. "Tell me, dost thou believe that the Messiah is soon to be born in this land?"

And Mary made bold answer: "Yea, master, inasmuch as the angel of the Lord hath appeared unto the shepherds of these hills and hath told them of the coming of the King.

The old man was stirred by this tale, and questioned the maid further concerning it and he was amazed by her knowledge of the prophecies that foretold of the birth of the deliverer. Before he had made an end of words he told Mary that when he discovered this Son of the Highest he would bring gold and precious stones, and would come and worship beside His cradle.

"But if he were born in some lowly habitation?" questioned a greybeard.

I would worship my Lord and King if He lay beneath the stars and had no covering to His head. I would worship Him if He lay in a shepherd's hut. For truly no man knoweth the greatness of the morrow. The son of the shepherd may be chosen to sit in the high places. All hath changed. Who can tell whether the lowliest shall not rise to be the first among the people. Verily it hath been declared that the first shall be last and the last first.

This and other sayings uttered by the sage Mary gathered within her heart.

That night as she lay upon the straw in the stable her thoughts did not journey back to the green hills of Galilee, they journeyed forward, imaging as she fell asleep her dream-Mary, the mother of the King.



CHAPTER VI

Winter passed like a somber bird of prey through that valley. Old men and women who dwelt among the hills were stricken by the hardship of untoward cold. Even Mary, the joyful maid, was sad at heart for a brief while, and she yearned for the gentle breezes of Galilee, for the soft airs of the lake, the kindly mists that rose from its waters while snow laid white turbans upon the mountains and winds hissed and screamed their bitterness through the hills.

Spring came at last, quiet and timid as the young deer of the woods, each day creeping nearer to the men and women who lived in the heights and about the valley where Mary dwelt. Even its rocky sides were gladdened by green blades of grass springing here and there, thrusting themselves between the stones. Small bushes put on their caps of green, and the sun smiled upon them all.

It seemed that, with the coming of the new season, the soul of Mary awoke also and each hour drew nearer to God. In those days there were few guests at the inn, and she might walk abroad and seek the lonely places as was her custom in Galilee in past times. So her dream grew, and now she knew it to wholly true. Forasmuch as one night when she laid herself down to rest the angel of the Lord appeared to her, declaring His will. The maid was neither fearful nor astonished, as she told Mary the sister of Joseph in a later time. "I knew that Gabriel would come, I had prayed so much, desired for so long that he should give me greeting, bearing the blessings of the Highest to me; so that I was in no way afraid."

And the angel spoke, saying: "Thou are highly favored, Mary, and art blessed among all women. For thou has been chosen to bear a Son, and He shall be called Jesus. And He is the redeemer, the deliverer of men. He shall be called the Son the Highest, and shall be of the House of David and reign for ever in the place of Jacob over the chosen people of the Lord.."

The night was still; there was no noise, no sound of steps upon the stones as the angel withdrew, passing through the door, fading thus from the sight of the kneeling maid. Then great was her joy and many the words of her thanksgiving. She could neither fear nor doubt any more. She had not prayed, dreamed, desired in vain. She was chosen from among all women.

Now on the day that followed the visitation of Gabriel, a young man and a girl come down the narrow winding way that leads through the ravines and rocks into that lone habitation of man. Perceiving a mule and travelers from afar, the innkeeper bade Mary prepare food. She was making bread and Joseph the young carpenter entered the house and greeted her. Behind him was his sister Mary, who hastened towards the maid, kissing her upon each cheek, laying her arms about her, speaking of the love between them and the joy of such a meeting.

Food and drink were set before the travelers. Then, when they had eaten Joseph went forth to give water and grass to the mule. And the two Marys wandered down the path through the valley, opening their hearts to one another.

"I am to marry Clopas, the trader," said Joseph's sister. He hath bought me these several seasons, and at last, I have yielded and will be his wife."

After they had talked awhile of this matter Mary spoke of the angel of the Lord and of his visit to the stable in the night that was past. Her friend was greatly uplifted when she

learned of the promise of a Son, Jesus, who would be the Redeemer of Israel. Then all of a sudden silence fell between them, and the countenance of the elder of the two maids was changed. "How may this be?" she said; "Thou knowest no sage, no great man who reigneth in high places, and if a son is born to thee this is needful."

And Mary answered: "I cannot tell how this thing shall come to pass. But as surely as the

sun will rise on the morrow, as surely shall this Son be born to me."

Then Joseph came down the path, and the two women spoke no more of this matter. After a time the carpenter's sister declared that she was weary, and that she must rest by the way. So the two, her brother and Mary, wandered forward in the sunset light. And Mary plucked a flower here, a flower there, and gave them to Joseph and sang joyfully while the shadows fell across the hills, making light and dimness in her road.

Joseph asked her if she sorrowed for Galilee, for its hills and coasts.

"Nay, I grieve not for them because I am chosen, because the angel of the Lord hath visited me. So all my days are joyful, my nights sweet with repose; and no labour is hard to me, no hardship giveth me pain. Is not my Lord with me daily though I do not perceive Him. Is not peace therefore wholly mine?"

Joseph learned that Mary had spoken with Gabriel. But she did not relate the words of his message. This she would hide from all save her loved sister who knew the secrets of her soul.

In a little while when day was done and the sun had sunk behind the cliff, Joseph spoke of his desire to take Mary back with him to Nazareth and to make her his wife.

Then she was troubled; the flowers fell from her hands, strewing the path; she went forward in silence, crushing them and their fragrance beneath her feet.

Again Joscph spoke, praying and entreating her to hearken to him, declaring his love and his will to keep her from all trouble and hardship. "Here thou toilst early and late. Thy cousin is a hard man; he speaketh to thee with heat and cruelty. Thy life is full of labour and has little joy in such a harsh and lonely place. Come back to the hills of Galilee. Return to the lake which is dear to thee; and I will guard and keep thee from all toll and evil, and thou shalt be my wife. The neighbours in Galilee still speak strangely of thee and their words anger me. But now if thou wilt be my wife there shall be no more reproaches. Soon my sister will leave me and will dwell with Clopas. Then shall I be alone."

 And suddenly Mary wept and declared that this could not be. She hastened away from the  carpenter, running down the darkening valley, not stopping or staying until she lay upon the straw of the stable, still weeping, breathing heavily and fearfully. There was the maid found by his sister who kissed her and comforted her.

CHAPTER VII

All the heavens shone with the jeweled raiment of God. Night bore a blue mantle it cast about the earth; and its peace bore peace to men. Streams from the winter rains splashed and murmured among the rocks and their whisper sighed through the hours of sleep; while the starry lights of the robe of God rejoiced and delighted one sorrowful watcher.

Mary had bidden farewell to the travelers. She was alone once more and heaviness deserted her as she gazed up into the skies. Even when the hour for rest was come and she lay within the stable she could still perceive those heavens, could gaze at them through the broken roof. And it seemed to her mind that be jewels set in them became alive, that the stars were joyful beings that danced and sang. Then for a little while she slept; and when she woke again she thought that the skies had changed. One great star shone down upon her; and she thrust out her arms, seeking to cry to it a greeting. But her mouth could not shape the joyful words, yet she knew in her heart it was the star in the east of which the whitebearded sage had spoken.

And that dark stable was illumined as by some light from within; and one by one the wise men passed in procession, bearing with them goblets of gold, precious spices and perfumed myrrh. They paid no heed to the lonely watcher but halted before the manger, kneeling and bowing their heads, holding up their offerings, then laying them upon the earth beneath it.

Mary spoke no word, yet she knew in that hour that her son lay there.

Softly as the breath of a night breeze upon the waters of Galilee came the whisper of Gabriel's word: "The Song of the Highest, the Redeemer, the Deliverer. He shall sit on the throne of Jacob for ever."



CHAPTER VIII

No sun shone on the day that followed this night of vigil but the earth did not frown. All things rejoiced, the flowers giving forth unwonted sweetness; the stream that soon would be dry sounding its little lay; one lone bird softly singing in that wilderness.

Mary bore the clothes of the household to the waterside; and as she washed them in the clear, cold stream she hearkened to the speech of the land about her. Even the grasses and the little misshapen trees seemed to tell their tale of quiet delight to the silent hour. For the life of spring stirred in all things on that gracious day.

Above Mary stretched the wide sky covered with clouds like the white and grey feathers upon the breast of a bird. Only a gentle light reached down from God to the maid in those swiftly passing moments, in that day when she was glad as never before.

All had been accomplished. She knew now that she had but to wait in patience for the coming of the king. She had learned in the night that was over that she was worthy. She had seen the image of the years to come. The seed of the Spirit was sown on virgin soil. It would increase, and in due course, the soul of the deliverer would stir within a man before whom all the peoples of the earth bowed their heads; one who crowned Israel with life, and gave salvation to all who desired it.

No winds blew that day in those highlands; no step of the stranger sounded through the valley. The innkeeper had set out on a journey. The housewife slumbered within the dwelling. All the hours of noon and early night Mary was alone with her labour and her dream—the Spirit of another which she had conceived within her spirit. No fear was hers; the Son of God rested and slept within her soul, and joy, as has not been known since on earth, filled her whole being in full measure. So that at times she must rest to whisper her gladness and her thanks, declaring it to her Lord who was companion and beloved through all the lone hours of that holy day.

When dusk dimmed the valley the clouds opened a little in the west, and a crown of gold hung above the earth, one that cast its rays upon the hills seeming to give them glory ere it passed, fading out among the gathering shadows of night.

The linen had dried upon the rocks. Mary now laid it in her basket, and then halted, her hands idle at last. She gazed down the slope, feeling the warm spring breath upon her cheek, swiftly rustling by, departing with the vanishing day. She knelt and gave thanks yet again for those perfect hours which would never return, which bore to her a sweetness ineffable, a glory that has never died.

In that lonely time, when no living man or woman was near to her, she conceived within her spirit the One pure Spirit; and this is a mystery which cannot be declared, which may be known by children and the simple of heart yet denied to men of wisdom and those who have no understanding.

Night folded the valley within its embrace. Mary entered the inn, laid down the linen and roused the housewife from her slumber. Then she prepared the supper for Chiraeus, and having partaken of bread and of goats' milk, set a candle in the window that would guide the returning traveler, and withdrew for the night to the stable, where she slept deeply and heavily, putting off from her remembrance joy, sorrow, hope and fear, gladness and the hardship of toiling hours.

CHAPTER IX

In the hilly country of Judaea there is little shelter from burning summer suns; and when spring was passed labour became a weariness, and the hours of noon bore heaviness and pain with them for those who laboured and might not rest.

The housewife sickened and died. So the tasks set upon Mary multiplied. She had the whole care of the inn and must serve the innkeeper as well as passing travelers. He was old and fretful and spoke hard words to her, his tongue scarcely ever silent between sunrise and sundown. The maid did not dream any more; for she could not escape from the scolding speech of this ancient, who would follow her to and fro with his bawling voice, crying out

to her if she halted even for an instant in her labours.

Those months stretched away with the length of years. They set hollows in the cheeks of this handmaid who had seen but seventeen summers. Her bones showed where there should have been flesh, and her eyes were oft times heavy with weeping.

It was not the hardships, that might well have been the portion of the galley slave, which caused such tears. She mourned because her dream had been snatched away from her and continual weariness bowed down her slender body. She could not feel the presence of God any more. No time was there for converse with the Invisible One in the quiet places. She was scarcely ever alone or free from toil. When at night she stumbled to the stable door her body fell upon the straw; and so ravaged was it by those long hours of serving she could not be wakeful and even for an hour seek her Lord in the only solitude that was hers. At daybreak she would start to her feet fearing the blows of the innkeeper if she tarried, seeking further rest. And again through all the hours of another day she was driven from one task to another.

As autumn drew near, her strength drew near to its end. Strange fears beset her soul. When evening was passing into night it seemed that demons came and went, passing up and down that valley. They whispered in her ear and told her that they were servants of Chiraeus come to watch her even as she lay alone in the stable. So her sleep was no longer peaceful and untroubled. She would wake, crying out, for it seemed that the demons were about her, scourging her with rods; and even the power to pray failed her in that direful season. She could shape no words; for God had forgotten. Such was her fear. He was away somewhere behind the blue heavens, and hearkened no more to His child.

There came an evening when certain travelers, who were journeying to Galilee, halted at the inn, and among them was a woman named Miriam. She was one of those neighbours who had derided Mary when she walked the hills, and had uttered base sayings.

In her haste to serve these people the maid broke a pitcher, and the innkeeper cursed her, calling her by many evil names. Then Miriam fastened her gaze upon the stricken handmaid, and knowing her once again, cried out: "This is Mary, the daughter of the fisherman, a maid of ill repute in Nazareth. Thou declarest only what is true in such names upon her. We would not suffer our daughters to hold speech with this child of Satan. She is, we believe, accursed. Put her from your dwelling and you will be well served."

Now Miriam desired to marry her daughter [to] Joseph. She knew that he cared only for Mary, therefore she uttered this scandal concerning the outcast. And Mary shrank away, moaning and lamenting as if she had been smitten with a sharp spear.

Miriam's husband had paid the innkeeper well. So he was prepared to believe her story. Seeking to please the woman he took up a rod and thrust Mary from the house, striking her many times, so that she fell upon the stones in a swoon.

He did not heed her but returned to the inn and to the company of these folk who had other tales to tell of happenings in Galilee.

The cold of the night roused the maid at last; and she rose in great pain, creeping and stumbling to the stable. There she lay in a fever when the sun rose on another day. And the innkeeper was sorry when he perceived his handiwork; inasmuch as she could not serve him while the sickness was upon her, while the wounds were open and unhealed.

A week went by before she could rise again from the straw, before the fever was passed. Now a great fear was hers. She had not the strength to serve Chiraeus; she believed he would cast her forth and she must die in the wilderness, for his mind was closed to pity or compassion.

She feigned weakness, lying moaning upon the straw. And when he bore her bread and water in the evening he spoke of his purpose: "If thou dost not arise on the morrow I will cast thee into the wilderness, and thou shalt be carrion before another sun doth set. I will not be charged with the burden of feeding and keeping a woman of evil repute, whose name is a reproach in Galilee."

When the innkeeper had departed Mary rose up, and at last, in her need, her tongue was loosed and she could pray to God. Out of her desolation did she cry, entreating that He would send His Angel of Death and speedily deliver her from wicked tongues and from her woeful misery. She could not face the anguish of the wilderness, an outcast and a wanderer, to be devoured by jackals or by wolves.

Fearful were her cries as she thought of the menaces of Chiraeus. And even as she

lamented, a voice called: "Mary, Mary." So gentle was its sound she deemed that she hearkened to the Angel of Death, that he had come swiftly in answer to her prayer, and soon would be her deliverance.

She dared no[t] raise her head, for in this very hour, that perhaps bore freedom with it, she called to mind her dream; and a bitterness more terrible than any death possessed the dreamer. She had not been found worthy. Therefore she was rejected and would not be the mother of the Messiah.

Now the voice was whispering in her ear and lips were pressed upon her cheek. She opened her eyes; all fear of death, night, and lonely failure fled from her as she perceived not an angel but the face of Joseph, the young carpenter.

He would not have her abide for another hour in that valley wherein she had been so close to death and had tasted of the bitterness of Hell. He told the innkeeper that Mary was his espoused wife, and that he was setting out forthwith to Nazareth. The two men spoke hard words to one another, Chiraeus declaring the scandal that had been spoken by Miriam, and seeking with other base sayings to anger the carpenter and to justify his cruelty. For the marks of the rod still showed upon the body of the maid, and she was shrunken as an old woman in her limbs by reason of her many hardships and the small measure of food given to her in the past season.

However, perceiving the white hairs of the innkeeper Joseph did not, as he was at first minded, strike this tyrant to the earth. "Verily he is possessed by an evil spirit. I will leave him to be devoured by it in this loneliness," said the carpenter. "There can be no greater punishment."

 And in the winter that followed these words were fulfilled. The innkeeper became the prey of evil spirits and perished miserably.

CHAPTER X

Now as he journeyed through the night Joseph perceived that Mary drooped and pined; and fearing lest she would fall into a swoon and pass hence, lie cast about, searching the hills, not following the road.

In a little while he came upon several shepherds who were gathered about a fire and were partaking of their evening meal. These he greeted, and on learning his story, they made him welcome.

"Chiraeus hath been possessed by a devil this long while past," said one. I saw him strike this maid, but feared to cry out upon him, for he is rich and is the friend of my master who possesseth many flocks."

"Mary is innocent, and we believe that she is holy," said another shepherd lad.

"She hath been set apart for a high purpose," declared a third.

And before she fell asleep these words entered Mary's weary understanding, bearing to her that vanished joy which had given sweetness and delight to all her youthful days.

 At times through the night she was roused by the pains in her body. But she opened her eyes to the Stars and they seemed no more far off and strangers, again they were bright beings of light, or again, they were shining jewels sewn upon the robe of God. And then she would slumber, not stirring till the sun had risen and the shepherds were abroad, calling to the dogs, loosing their sheep from the fold.

CHAPTER XI

The face of the land about Nazareth had changed. Trees and plants all were turned to colours of red, silver and gold. The autumn breath, pure and cool, wandered over all those coasts, even over the desert that adjoins and over Tiberias, the Roman city of high buildings and of white towers.

For the first time for many months the light stole into Mary's eyes. Her body trembled with

delight as she gazed down from the hill and from the mule on which she was being borne, and perceived all that region she had known and loved so well.

She was coming home, returning to the place which had given her her celestial dream, which would in due season, she believed, render that living testimony that she had walked with God.

Slowly the mules descended passing from the highlands and the last lights of day into the shades of evening. And when that first smooth flowing darkness had passed them by, the soft light of starshine and of moon fire made the way clear for these tired travelers. The power of speech was reft from them by their joy; and as they gazed across the silver sea of Galilee and perceived the dim shapes of fishing ships and drooping sails, they joined hands, making their covenant for all the future time, whispering their vows the one to the other.

It is true that Joseph had not sought out Mary after the fashion of the Jews. They always desired observances and various seemly rites. But the young folk gave no thought to the morrow, nor to the talk of men and women. Joseph delivered his weary charge into the arms of his sister Mary, now wife of Clopas. She set food before her and then caused her to rest after her bruises had been bathed and ointments had assuaged their pain.

But early in the day that followed, Miriam knocked upon the door of the dwelling and thrust herself within when Joseph opened it. Her countenance was dark with malice and uncharitableness; and when she perceived the two Marys, she signed to Joseph to follow her so that she could speak with him alone.

In the garden without the dwelling she declared her mind, uttering many falsehoods. "This Mary, daughter of the fisherman, since his death, hath lived wildly and barbarously. Thou knowest how she walked alone upon the hills of Galilee. It was for an evil purpose she thus wandered to and fro. And even when she dwelt with her cousin the innkeeper she lived after the same manner. So I learned from him. If thou seekest to cure her of the evil in her heart verily thou wilt fail. Wherefore, be not foolish and make her thy wife. She is truly a woman of evil repute. Put her away privily while there is yet time."

Terrible was the anger of Joseph at these words; and he could scarcely hold back from striking Miriam. But for Mary's sake he contained himself, bidding this scoundrel be gone, crying out: "This maid is pure and holy as the dawn. She spake with God and walked with God when she was alone upon the hills. Thou art the vilest among women because thou hast sought to decry innocence and to smirch the pure loveliness of this child. Begone, I tell thee, before I shame myself by laying violent hands upon thee and thy grey hairs. Begone, else thou wilt suffer for the wrong thou doest to the maid who is to be my wife."

Miriam made no answer but went hastily down the path and when she had reached her home she hatched evil thoughts in her mind saying that Joseph had desired to take Mary to wife, but now was minded to put her away prissily. That the maid had sinned and was so corrupt not one among them should hold speech with her.

So there was no welcome for Mary in Galilee. The neighbours drew back their skirts from her and whispered and peered as she passed down the road. Some of their words were spoken in her hearing and their vileness was such she had no understanding of their wickedness. For she was simple and innocent of mind as a little child.

And the brows of Joseph were black with wrath because he could not suffer to have the name of his beloved thus sullied, and bear with it in silence. He took counsel with his ~~brother~~ concerning those women, gross in mind and body, who were as the pestilence that ~~destroys~~. And the wife of Clopas said: "No blast shall wither up this love of thine. I will instruct Mary in this matter, and once she is armed against these folk she will be safe from the malice of their tongues."

Before she departed from Galilee with her husband she talked much with the maid, discovering to her innocent soul the sorry things of life and declaring also those joys that were hidden from her mind.

CHAPTER XII

After their marriage Joseph and his wife departed from Nazareth to a place where they

were not known. And Mary brought forth a son in great fear yet in gladness also. In that times [s]he was near to death, but again, as at the inn, death held back; and each day Mary increased in strength and could speak with Joseph who promised that her son should be called Jesus. This was the name that Gabriel had declared to Mary before ever the child lay in her womb.

She was troubled and perplexed in mind while her purification was being accomplished. Joseph spoke little to her, and there was sombreness in his manner, darkness in his eye. They might not for a space return to Nazareth because of the scandal that would be spoken by the goodwives of the town. So, as both husband and wife were doubtful of heart, each one fearing to cleave the silence, to declare their mind concerning the babe who had been born among strangers, they determined to follow the counsel of the scribe who bade them go up to Jerusalem, where the child might be presented to the Lord, and perhaps He would reveal His purpose concerning them.

Mary rejoiced when she gazed upon the Holy City of Zion and perceived the mighty Temple with its shining roof glimmering in the sun; and she marvelled at the greatness of its girth at the multitude that thronged the courts. Sweet to her hearing was the chanting of the priests, noble the call of the trumpet when it sounded from the threshold of that Temple. It was as if it called to the babe who lay close to her bosom, who stirred and then slumbered again.

Unrest and vexation no more distressed the young wife's soul. She waited in faith, sure that a sign would soon be shown, that the darkness that lay heavy between her and Joseph would be removed. And as they were departing from the Temple after having made the offering of turtle doves, they encountered a priest who had in an earlier hour held speech with them. His name was Simeon and he was an upright man. Now his face shone with the light of the Spirit and he drew the carpenter and his wife away from the crowding people.

In a small and quiet corner of the great Temple this ancient, of a sudden, broke forth into beautiful speech, praising God. Joseph and Mary knelt down, marvelling at this psalm of thanksgiving, at the noble mien of the singer. Soon they discerned that he spoke of the babe who lay in Mary's arms, that lie hailed Him as the Messiah, as the Redeemer who would be a glory to Israel. Doubt departed, shame and perplexity fled away like birds of the night. Joseph was no more cast down, fearing the evil reproaches of his neighbours in Galilee. He turned his face to Mary and smiled, and perceiving that smile, she knew that all was well between them, that the darkness had lifted.

Marvel was heaped on marvel. For when Simeon had taken the child from His Mother, blessing Him, an aged woman named Anna came into that quiet place. She swiftly lifted up her voice, hailing the Babe also as the Messiah, thanking God for His coming.

"This child is set for the rising and falling of many in Israel," said the priest. "And behold, a sharp sword shall pierce His Mother's heart because of Him."

When he had said these words Joseph drew him apart and declared his perplexities in his ear. He told of the scandal uttered by the neighbours and of all those dark sayings that might again be spoken if they came forth boldly and recounted the tale of Gabriel's promise to Mary, if they claimed that Jesus was the Messiah according to the words of the angels.

Then Simeon gave them wise counsel. "Tell no man of these things, speak not of them even to this child when he reacheth the years of understanding. Live in all quietness and watch the boy in his growth. See that he followeth the bidding of his own heart. For ye know not in what mariner, or in what hour, he will be called, so that he may deliver not only Israel, but the Gentiles also, and be the salvation of men."

Thanking the priest for his words of counsel, Joseph and Mary departed from the Temple. They were poor, and soon were compelled to journey back to Nazareth. Only in this town was there work for Joseph. Now that his little store of money was spent he must give over his days to labour so that the mother and the child should be fed.

A great gladness filled the soul of Mary as she bade farewell to Jerusalem. Soon it passed from sight and they journeyed among the barren hills and traversed the dried and withered valleys. But these sombre regions cast no shadow upon her dream.

Once again in Nazareth Joseph and Mary kept to themselves. Mary would not gossip with the women, fearing their curious minds and their questioning speech if they looked upon the babe, holding him in their arms. She did not seek the solitude of the hills. Only now

and then on a day when Joseph was not working at home and many of the neighbours were away at the festival, she stole forth into the fields and by the brook of the willows above Nazareth she rested, and there hearkened to the plaint of the breezes in the leaves and to the murmur of the waters.

Such hours gave her courage for this new life which had its times of hardship inasmuch as Joseph found but little work because of the talk that was soon made by the people.

Always he was gentle to his wife, cherishing her, but he commanded that she should keep silence concerning the revelation which had been vouchsafed by the angel and by Simeon. "These are hard and perilous times," he declared. "Let us hold our peace until the reproach hath been lifted from us, and we be as others and come to find our friends in Nazareth."

Mary obeyed him, guarding within her mind those thoughts that concerned her son Jesus and that future time when he would be known to Israel. But despite her quiet life evil was spoken; and one day as she walked abroad carrying the babe in her arms women followed her, making of her a mock and a derision. She fled from them to the hut in which Joseph dwelt, and there she lay for a long while trembling and weeping because of this blast of fury and hate of which her innocent soul could have no understanding.

After that time she spoke no more to Joseph of the Redeemer and Deliverer, nor did she even suffer the thought of Him to abide within her spirit.

CHAPTER XIII

After the passing of sixteen seasons Mary Clopas returned to Galilee. She had no tidings in all that time of her brother, the carpenter, and as she journeyed to Nazareth she pondered much, asking herself whether Mary would be as she had left her or whether she were now as other women.

The two could scarce contain their joy in the hour they greeted one another.

"Joseph hath but a longer beard," cried Mary Clopas. "He hath not, save in the whiteness of his cheeks, been marked by the four summers and winters that have parted us."

As to the carpenter's wife the good woman's tongue was silent. For Mary was no more the slender maid of yester year. She had increased in beauty and in grace. Now she was a woman, and time had changed her countenance, given fullness to her limbs. But sadness had set its stamp upon her brow. Another Mary sat in the place of Mary the maid.

Three babes played upon the earthen floor. Her hands never rested, either she was preparing food for them and her husband or her fingers were busy with the distaff, and she wove cloth as she watched by her children and laboured with such diligence her old friend marvelled not a little.

"Thou art changed in all thy ways," she said. "Tell me, Mary, art thou changed in spirit also?"

"I cannot tell," the other answered. And there was sorrow in the voice as she spoke these words.

"Be not cast down because youth hath flowered into womanhood. But tell me, Mary, dost thou still dream?"

" Nay, I give no thought to what is not of the day. For there are five mouths to be filled and Joseph lay for a long while upon a bed of sickness. Wherefore, we are in debt and must labour ceaselessly until all that is owed is paid."

And her sister perceived that she spoke the truth, learning from her brother that great had been their hardship. "Assuredly I should have died if it had not been for Mary's great love," he declared. "She hath laboured all the day and far into the night these several seasons that I might regain my strength and we should not starve."

Then was the elder woman grieved. Fastening her eyes upon Mary she perceived the marks of her labours and her suffering upon her countenance. "There hath been no time for dreams, no thought for the Son who will be the deliverer of Israel?" she whispered.

"Scarce time for prayer even. Not for many moons have I gone farther than the streets of

Nazareth. I walk no more upon the hills."

"But surely one of these three is the chosen of the angels? Hast thou forgotten the promise of Gabriel, his visit to thee when thou wast at the inn among the hills?"

"Nay, I could not forget," Mary answered; "and at times I have wept because no angel hath visited me in these latter days, not even when afflictions were heaped upon afflictions, and I feared lest my babes should perish with hunger, not even when I was compelled to beg bread for them at Miriam's door."

"Then hath the promise of Gabriel been broken?" inquired Mary Clopas.

"Gaze upon these children of mine, and peradventure, thou wilt find an answer."

Mary Clopas perceived that some hard saying was held back by the mother of Jesus so she spoke gently, seeking by persuasion and kindly speech to draw the hidden sorrow from the heart of memory.

And when Mary spoke of that secret trouble it was as if a javelin were drawn from a wound, and anguish and quaking of the body accompanied her confession.

"We were not many months in Nazareth," she said; "and though we held apart from the people life was not hard. There was no hunger in our house; we had enough and were satisfied. Howsoever, Miriam rested not and sought to torment me further. She hired Joseph, causing him to shape new door posts for her dwelling and to labour in her garden. One evening when the heat of day was overpast, and he had not eaten, she bade him to her board, setting him among her guests. And she placed new wine before him.

"Now he was not accustomed to strong drink. And having fasted his head speedily became bemused, his tongue loosed. He told to all the people the tale of my Lord, of the promise given me by Gabriel concerning my first born. Scarce had he made an end when the company began to make a mock of me and of his words. Nay, more, the elders grew wrathful and declared that my wickedness was monstrous, that I sought to excuse myself by telling blasphemous fables. Wherefore Miriam's guests set upon Joseph, driving him forth from the house. He staggered and stumbled, going this way and that. The young men made sport of him, so that anger rose up in his soul and he sought to strike at them, not heeding his steps in that stony way.

"It was at the end of summer and the well in Miriam's garden was empty of water and lay open to the sky. Joseph fell therein: and it was only with much labour they raised him up from it after many hours had passed. And when he lay upon the earth the neighbours discovered that he could not walk. There were but bruises on his back, yet it was as if it were dead. For weeks he lay within the hut and I must tend him and the babe and strive to feed them when there was no money for bread.

"The harvest was scanty on the hills; the vineyards and the olives failed in that season. Those neighbours who would gladly have helped me went hungry also and dared not share their small measure of bread with me else might their own kin have perished. At last I was compelled to beg at Miriam's door. And behold, the poison of asps is under her lips. She would only give me bread if I hearkened in silence to the vile names she set upon me and upon my babe.

"In time health returned to Joseph. But even then I perceived that the hurt caused by the chronicle of Gabriel and of my belief that Jesus was the Chosen One still endured and men looked askance at my husband's work. He is a skilled craftsman and there is not his like on the shores of Galilee. Yet the belief that was my joy and now is my shame, in those months caused the people to pass him by and refuse to hire him for labour in their houses or on their boats. Some traders went even to Tiberias, paying a great price for Tiberian craftsmen; and it is not until this season that the wrath of the people hath abated. They are slowly forgetting the reason for their anger; so if we continue in all quietness and speak smooth words to the neighbours we may be suffered to live and will not starve when winter comes again."

"Then we must be careful in our speech," said Mary Clopas; "and speak no word concerning

the promised Redeemer."

"Yea, that is so. For if we do not hide it from all men we shall perish. I am afraid for my husband and my children. Fear and doubt are mine. Peradventure, Miriam declareth the truth. In my ignorance I may have spoken what is but a blasphemous fable." Mary bowed her head, and her countenance showed her distress and anguish, all that she had suffered through the malice of a jealous woman.

After a while Mary Clopas spoke again, saying: "It was no blasphemous fable. I believe, Mary, that Gabriel visited thee in the night time and that his promise as declared by him, will in due course be fulfilled."

"When thou art with me I believe in its truth. But I shall doubt again. I have no knowledge, and the scribe came to me and admonished me for my unseemly beliefs, bidding me regard them as the whisperings of the demons."

Mary wept. Then Joseph called from the garden, and his sister went to him and learned that his mind was now set against that wonder which had made a marvel of Mary's first youthful days. He held it to be a shame that must be hidden away, and he said: "It hath brought me to the very doors of death. Wherefore I know it to be evil."

"And what of the prophecy of Simeon the priest?"

"Nay, he was a false prophet. Great harm hath been wrought by these foolish imaginations of ours. In the coming time I desire that this thing shall be no more known between me and Mary. If we do not bury it deep within our hearts, if we do not in shame blot out its memory, truly the Lord will send a greater punishment and we shall, peradventure, perish out of the land. Promise to breathe no word of this shameful thing to any man. Let not my babes learn of it else our troubles will endure. Only if we remain silent shall we have happiness and secure again the prosperous days."

Now Mary Clopas was wise in her generation. She spoke only once more to Mary on this matter. "Be not ashamed or afraid because of this tribulation. Guard the secret of thy past, telling it to no man. But gather within thy heart all these things that have been imparted to thee concerning thy first born; and in the quiet hours ponder on them, asking thyself whether they are not fair and true gifts the Lord bestowed on thee in the 's ye did walk together upon the lonely hills."

Mary made no answer; she turned her face away from her friend.

CHAPTER XIV

Clopas served certain Galilean merchants, and because of his uprightness, was charged with their trading in Jerusalem and in Jericho. Mary soon departed from Nazareth in her husband's company, and for a long while she knew not the hills and the lovely coasts of the lake. Now and then travelers bore her tidings of Joseph and Mary. As she must for the most part dwell in Jericho she did not meet with these twain even when they made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

But certain of the kin of Clopas declared to his wife that the carpenter prospered and that happiness and peace were the portion of this household. It would seem that when they came to live as other men, when they sought no more the high and noble vision, the Evil One ceased in his persecution of them. They had but the small cares and the small pleasures of the family. And the tidings of their state, borne by travelers, showed that all was well for them, and hardship and fear were no more the spectres that hung about their door.

Seven summers and seven winters wandered by, each one dropping more swiftly into the pool of time. For the hours are the hirelings of joy and pain; and with the passage of the seasons increasing content hastened the days for Mary and for Joseph. They were as one mind, and no word in all those seven winters and summers was spoken by them of the promise of Gabriel, of the glory and splendour of the vision that preceded the birth of their first born.

Now a rich fish merchant desired that Clopas should charge himself with his commerce in Nazareth. So, once again, his wife Mary passed down the winding hilly streets of that town. She rode upon a mule in the long journey from Jerusalem, and now she was weary. But this weariness was forgotten as her eyes fell upon a little company who spoke eagerly

with one another. They came it seemed from the school in that street, and were set free from their letters before the heat of the day gathered about Nazareth. One among them Mary knew to be the son of Joseph because of his strong black hair, the girth of his figure and his eyes dark as the ripened grapes.

"This boy is surely the first born; yet it seemeth strange that he should thus have prospered

in his growth and be so handsome in his stature," muttered Mary; "inasmuch as he was small and ailing as a babe."

Beside this dark lad, with the rough bronze skin, stood another smaller boy whose eyes were as some soft brown pool shadowed by the trees, whose mien was grave and whose hair was of a russet hue. His pallid cheeks showed that he had neither the strength nor the vigour of his brother. His back drooped somewhat, and he was slender of body and like unto a young birch. As he spoke his whole body moved, it was seized as by the vehemence of a strong spirit that dwelt within it, and yet could scarcely be contained by its frame.

"Truly that lad will stir the souls of men and cause their hearts to burn," said Mary to her husband. I would watch these twain," and she halted the travel worn mule.

The one of greater height bade his companion and the smaller lads follow him and join in some sport by the well. But the brown eyed boy shook his head, saying: "Nay, I would walk among the hills. Let me seek mine own pleasure."

Then the dark youth became angry, and he incited his comrades to bait the lad who would not be of them. They set upon him as many bees within a hive will set upon one bee, and they flung the boy about, striking and smiting him.

Mary asked her husband to admonish the lads. But he would have none of it for he desired to reach his journey's end, and together they went forward, arriving in due course at the dwelling of the fish merchant.

When evening came Mary Clopas sought out the carpenter's house and was received with gladness by Mary who now was in the likeness of other Galilean women. That strangeness of mien, which had been hers, had vanished. She spoke comfortable words to her sister and seemed well content. As they supped together two lads entered the dwelling. These were the two Mary Clopas had encountered some hours before as she entered Nazareth. Soon she learned that the taller of the boys was named Thomas and was not Mary's first born. She was glad, as she had not forgotten the words of Simeon, the ancient, spoken in the Temple at Jerusalem. And truly this black haired youth was as one in a herd. He had strength and vigour and a handsome countenance, but noble understanding was not stamped upon his brow nor was there any light in his eyes. Gazing upon the slender brown haired lad, Mary Clopas stretched out hands to him in greeting, saying to his mother: "I would know Jesus as thy son because he is as thou wert in thy youth. He hath the strangeness of a being who walketh apart, who can never be of the multitude."

Jesus took her hands and smiled up at the traveler. He spoke no word; but the graciousness of his glance, the starry wonder of his eyes smote upon the soul of the watching woman. It was as if change came upon it and that she passed from one life to another. Almost she was frightened, and shook herself, seeking thereby to thrust from her this strangeness, and to enter again into the common mood of the household.

Later in the evening when the children slept and Mary might rest from the day's labours she joined her sister in the garden and spoke of these two lads: "Jesus is plain of countenance and hath no great strength of body, and at times I marvel because Thomas, who is a year younger in age, is strong and handsome and chief among all those of his generation. As Joseph hath declared, Thomas will rise to greatness. I know not in what manner. But the people will make talk of him, and he will be a master to whom the multitude will render homage."

"And what of Jesus?" inquired Mary Clopas.

"Nay, Joseph saith, 'He will come to naught.' And Joseph is a man of discernment. At times he feareth lest Jesus may be led into some snare of evil, lest, when he hath reached riper years he will bring shame upon us. For he walketh alone and maketh a comrade of the wandering beggar. He will not play with the other lads of his generation, and for hours will sit at the feet of travelers and grey beards, hearkening to their stories. I have known him twit a scribe with his ignorance, a scribe whose hairs were white, who is much honoured in Nazareth."

"Jesus will stir the hearts of men, and peradventure, rouse many of them to wrath," murmured Mary Clopas. "Wherefore I like him well."

"Yea' that is true," said his mother; "And because he speaketh hastily, not measuring his words in matters that concern only his elders, I am troubled, fearing lest such sudden angers, such boldness will lead him into seditious ways, and, in a later time, to the prison and the grave."

"But he is gentle of mien," said Mary Clopas, "and hath used me courteously. I perceived him on the road as I entered Nazareth; and behold, Thomas, his brother, struck him on the mouth, yet he did but fold his arms and gaze with scorn upon the striker, not answering blow with blow."

"Wherefore I have no doubt he angered Thomas the more," said Mary. "Truly, I would that he had rendered again that blow to his brother. For verily, he would then have been as other youths. It is this strangeness, his solitary ways and his sudden angers that perplex me and break my rest when I consider them in my mind."

"Jesus is the blossom of thine own lonely childhood and youth," said Mary Clopas.
 "Condemn him not, for in so doing thou mayest condemn thine hours of highest vision."

CHAPTER XV

For a time Mary Clopas was much concerned with her own household. Her sons were still of tender years, and her days passed in the care of children and in the furnishing of her new dwelling. However, the image of Jesus and the image of those early days of promise before and after his birth were often in her mind. And she spoke of him to James, her eldest son. "Seek out the company of Jesus, thy cousin, and tell me of his doings. Behold, he is wise beyond his years. Set him as an example before thee and go not with those others who will assuredly find fault with him, and mayhap, misuse him."

Now James was a quiet boy who held his peace even when he was with those of his own generation. Few knew his mind on any matter, and he had no quarrels, no controversies even in the games of youth; for his mien was humble. He observed his promise to his mother and watched Jesus, noting his sayings and his comings and goings. It is from his lips that Mary Clopas gathered this fragment of the tale of Jesus and of the first persecution he endured.

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There are gentle hills that rise above the lake of Galilee, and in those days fair woods grew upon their slopes-olive groves and vineyards were spread out across the hillside. Above Nazareth stretched a little plain from which the mountains might be perceived.

In the early day Jesus would climb the steep way that led to this flat summit of the hilly land about the town. And James followed him, but did not disclose himself to his cousin who was the elder of the two, for he feared his displeasure. However, Jesus did not look back, but wandered forward with his eyes fixed upon the hill above him. He did not rest until he was far from any habitation, until no eye of man could spy upon him. Then his mien changed. He would sing softly, gather flowers, or rest in the grasses, watching the birds.

After a space when the quiet would seem to have flowed into the young boy's heart he knelt and bowed his head.

Still James watched, and on occasions perceived that the shoulders of Jesus rose and fell, that his body was shaken as by some tempest of the mind. At other times he would be very still, and the watcher stealing close to him, perceived his uplifted face and such radiance, it was as the face of an angel.

Twice or thrice in that spring time Jesus rose from his knees and raised his hand with the gesture of greeting. He spoke aloud, uttering the words of the Holy Books, asking if this or that saying in them was the whole truth, or whether a further measure of words might be added to them; so that men might learn God's will in all clearness. And Jesus would pause and hearken as if a scribe were there who instructed him, or as if sages debated with one another. For he would speak eagerly, and at times, with heat, giving quick answers to what seemed always silence and solitude.

James gazed all around him, searching even among clustering trees, creeping softly here

and there. But he could not find any scribe; his eyes only perceived the wood on one hand, the grasses beneath and the blue floor of heaven above him. "Doth he talk with the flowers or the birds?" the boy inquired of the silence.

No answer came, and he perceived that Jesus made eager signs with his hands as if he sought to image upon the air the wisdom that words can but dimly image for men.

Always there came those pauses in his speech, the listening air, the eager question of the eye. And still there was no sign in that solitary place of any living man or woman.

Great was the trouble of James. He feared his cousin when he thus conversed with the bright air in the sunrise, when the only answer to his words came from the gentle breeze that blew from distant Carmel, or drifted whispering and sighing across the lake from the farther shore.

Being of a cautious mind James held his peace concerning these talks, and not one of his companions learned of them. He sought his mother's counsel in the matter; and she bade him draw near to Jesus if he communed again with the stones and grasses.

"Nay, neither stones nor grass can hold converse with Jesus," answered the boy. "Someone is there. I know not who it may be. But the Scribe of Nazareth hath told me that demons will at times appear to boys and whisper strange and evil sayings in their ears. He hath warned to me to be careful and to flee if any appear to me, thrusting my fingers in my ears. For if I greet them in speech I will assuredly be tempted and will be led to sin and to damnation."

"Jesus is not one to speak with demons," Mary answered. "Be not afraid. Do as I have bidden thee. And if thou art minded question thy cousin after he has spoken thus again with what seemeth to be emptiness."

So, one grey morning, when clouds crowded about the distant heights and mist wandered over the spreading waters of the lake James hid behind a tree that was but five cubits from the rock whereon Jesus knelt and seemed silently to pray.

It was a still hour and light came slowly. In that dusky time it was hard to read the face of the one who kneeled and gazed upwards into the eastern skies.

Suddenly he rose and cried out eagerly: "Master, I am here. I hearken."

Then followed a silence; and again Jesus cried: "So we are all children of God? . . . Yea, yea, that is so . . . even the wicked, those who have gone astray, even the Gentiles. Wherefore there is mercy for all."

Once again silence fell. But it seemed that this question, this cry that came from the very heart of the lad was answered, inasmuch as the joy of one who hath gathered up a wise saying now changed his face. The first rays of sun fell upon it, and he rose and paced to and fro as if he walked with another. After he had conversed for an hour in this fashion James could bear no more; but came from his hiding place, trembling and crying: "With whom speakest thou?"

Perceiving his cousin, Jesus answered with heat, commanding him to be silent. So stern was the voice of the boy James obeyed, and then certain words were whispered, Jesus drew away from the other, bowing his head.

After he had prayed he came again to the fearful watcher, and said to him: "Didst thou not see the man who walked with me?"

"Nay, I saw naught."

"Didst thou not perceive the prophet? Didst thou not hear his words?"

Nay, nay, the Scribe told me that only demons whisper in the ears of boys."

"And dost thou believe that this Shining One, who communed with me, was Beelzebub, Prince of Darkness?"

"Assuredly I cannot believe him to be other than a devil. The Scribe knoweth all things, so the schoolmaster told me when he bade me hearken to him."

For a time Jesus was silent, and then of a sudden, he plucked a white flower from the grasses. "Doth the Scribe know how this lily of the field groweth and becometh lovely in the sight of men? Doth he know the secret of its life? Hath he understanding of the marvel of

the seed that becometh a stem, that thrusteth forth leaves, buds, and at last the blossom that openeth into this fair flower?"

And James answered: "Nay, the Scribe cannot know this thing. 'Only God can know what is made by Him.' Such are the words of the schoolmaster."

"Then the Scribe knoweth not all things."

With troubled mien James bowed his head in assent to these words.

"And if he is ignorant concerning this flower he may be ignorant in a weightier case?"

"Yes, that is so."

"Wherefore, we may well say that the Scribe knoweth not with any surety whether demons whisper in my ear, or whether I speak with a prophet when the Shining One appeareth unto me in the morning silence."

"Yea, that is true. But he is a learned man, and if he cannot declare the name of the Invisible One, or his kind, how canst thou declare it? Thou art but a year older than I am, and thou scarce knowest thy letters."

"I have learned that when I draw apart from others, when I walk alone upon the hills that God, who is our Father in Heaven, can commune with me."

At these words James cast himself upon the ground, trembling and quaking. And for a time he dared not lift his head, for he had been told by his elders that he, an ignorant boy, should not utter aloud the name of the Highest. It was the name of the Ineffable One, and the Holiest of Holies should only be pronounced by the wise men and priests. He feared lest Jesus would be smitten to the earth, and he was amazed when, raising his eyes, he perceived that his cousin was still whole and smiled upon him.

"James, what dost trouble thee now?"

"Thou art surely possessed by a devil. Only a prophet, only a holy one, can speak with the Holiest of Holies. Those are the words of Benader, the Scribe."

"Benader, who cannot tell thee the secret of this small, white flower? Nay, cousin, it is foolish to believe the words of a man because he is old, weareth a white beard and uttereth many sayings. Know that God is my Father, and being my Father He is in me. So I can talk with Him here in the silence while day creepeth over the eastern hills. Howsoever, I bid thee declare these sayings of mine to no man, not even to our kin or to the Scribe."

"Truly I will hold my peace, for I am afraid." James cast his eyes upon the earth, and after a time cried out woefully: "Would that I had not come upon thee in this field! Would that I had not learned thy dark secret!"

"Nay, it is not dark; it is the joy of all my days. For me there is no happier hour than when my Father in Heaven communeth thus with me. If thou couldst but hearken too, cousin, if from out the stillness of this dawn there could flow though thy soul the words of Our Father, then thou wouldest be no more afraid and joy would ever be thine."

"Thou speakest as if thou were the Holiest of Holies, as if thou and the Great Name were One." This time James's face went white and he gaped at Jesus, so great was his terror.

"Nay, I am the son of God. And as the son is in the likeness of the Father so I desire to be in the likeness of my Father in Heaven. The prophet Elias, who appeared unto me on this hill, first told me how I might commune with God, and learn thus to be in His Image and do His will in all things."

As James now gazed upon Jesus and hearkened to his lofty speech, wonder took the place of fear, awe filled his soul, and he bowed his head, saying: "Thou wilt be a great rabbi when thou art grown.

"Nay, I seek not to be a rabbi, I only seek to do the will of my Father in Heaven." After this saying Jesus spoke no more. He went forward through the fields and groves. He was wrapped as in a cloud that held him apart and away from the other lad. At times he raised his head, his eyes lighting up with dream as they gazed down upon the sea of Galilee, or across and around its waters to the encircling hills.

Now the colours of the day brightened all the earth. To the west was the gracious shape of Carmel. Farther away flowed the mountains of Gilboa, disappearing into distance, and closer lay the rounded breast of Tabor, while between the hills flowed the Jordan, the river

of promise to Israel. Eastwards stretched the high plains that neither rise nor fall, that seem without end. To the north, the boys knew, was Caesarea Philippi, the corrupt city of the Gentiles hid beneath Hermon. And southwards Jesus turned his eyes while his yearning soul imagined what lay beyond those Samarian hills, the land of Judaea and that Holy City of Zion of which he had no memory, only having been taken there as a babe. The psalms told of Jerusalem, the prophets spoke of it, travelers declared its wonder.

And Jesus longed for the hour when his eyes would behold this city of his Father. He believed that walking in its streets, walking in the courts of the Temple he would always have God as his companion, that the nearness of the presence of the Ineffable One would only be truly known to him when, for the first time as a lad, he sojourned in this City of the Great King.

In a later season he spoke of this dream to James, and more and more as the days passed, the boy sought out his cousin, following him and watching by him in his solitary vigils among the heights above Nazareth.



CHAPTER XVI

As he entered his dwelling Mary Clopas perceived that Joseph was angry. She guessed that Jesus had offended, for the lad's face was sorrowful. But it did not hold in it sorrow for trespass. It held only that proud distress which arises when, between two who love one another, there is the vexation of a deep misunderstanding.

In a little while Mary Clopas learned the cause of this trouble. And it seemed to her mind foolishness; inasmuch as the carpenter grieved because the schoolmaster had declared that Jesus drowsed and dreamed over his letters. He who should, by reason of his age, be first among the boys, was last.

Thinking of the tales related to her by James. Mary said: "Jesus is a strange lad and liveth a life apart from the other boys. Truly I believe that in him are the seeds of greatness. Some day Joseph, he will be a master in Israel."

"He will some day be called the fool of Nazareth if he doth not soon learn to read the Holy Book and shape the Hebrew letters," cried the carpenter. "Verily, he hath ever been a subject for trouble and vexation. I teach him and Thomas my trade. But over carpentry also he dreameth and drowseth. He hath a quick wit, yet will not serve himself of it. So Thomas, who is the younger brother, is both the better scholar and the better craftsman."

"Yea, but Jesus hath the greater wisdom."

"Wisdom is the possession of the scribes," Joseph answered. "What can a boy know of wisdom?"

"If thou wilt be the friend of thine eldest son thou wilt soon perceive that he hath a treasure of wisdom, a power of words that to me is a marvel and a miracle."

"Nay, nay, thou talkest foolishly. But what can women know of wisdom. Jesus will yet bring his mother and me to shame by reason of his ignorance and his insolence."

On hearing these words Mary answered: "He hath ever been courteous and kind to me, oft es carrying my pitcher of water from the well to my house. Whom hath he offended?"

"The Scribe of Nazareth," said Joseph. But when questioned by his sister he would not declare the offence; for he feared lest she would mock at him and again praise his son, upholding him in his froward courses.

CHAPTER XVII

The scribes are greatly revered by the people. It is said that the angels bless their learning. When they speak on any matter their sayings are prized; and when they discourse upon the Law of Moses no man dares to dispute with them in Galilee.

A simple folk live in the mountains of that land. They believe that pure wisdom is only to be found upon the lips of scribes. Few of these pass that way. The many teachers, who throng Jerusalem, gather about that great town as bees about a hive. They scorn the

simple Galileans and seek only to instruct the crowds that come and go in Zion's City.

So only one scribe dwells in Nazareth and holds intercourse with its inhabitants. Benader is known to all Jews who live upon the borders of the lake. He comes and goes, he visits the villages and the little towns. His voice has been heard even in those Gentile cities of Tiberias and Caesarea Philippi. It is said that his tongue, sharp as a dagger, has even

slit up the gross understanding of Romans; that in Caesarea Philippi these have been soundly chastened by it in past days when they sought to debate with this master of words.

"Therefore," as Joseph declared, "the people of Nazareth have good right to be proud of the Scribe. All men should bow down to him, hearkening in respectful silence to his sayings." And, for a time, this was so in that town. But there came a day when travelers rested at the inn; and these were Gentiles robed in costly attire.

The Scribe was challenged by one of them to debate with him by the fountain, for he had declared that the children of Israel alone were the possessors of true wisdom. However, Benader made proud answer. He would not demean himself by talking thus with a Gentile after the fashion of the Greeks. He declared that no faithful believer would either eat with the Gentile or hold speech with him unless there was for it some grievous necessity.

On receiving this message from him the Gentile made mock, saying: "This Scribe is afraid. He knoweth he cannot prove that Jews alone possess true wisdom. He knoweth that wisdom is as a wandering bird that maketh her nest in the trees of many a strange land. Truly he is an ignorant fellow."

Now when these sayings were borne to the Scribe certain Galileans urged that he should meet this stranger by the fountain, and smiting him with many words, cause him to be a mock and a derision, to flee from Nazareth in shame. But Benader would not yield to this demand, though he was much incensed and his choler such he rebuked and reviled his household without ceasing for three days.

The companions of this Gentile who had challenged the Scribe, departed, leaving him alone at the inn. He was pleased with the beauty of the lake and the mountains and would abide there for a while longer. And it came to pass that one day he perceived Jesus walking with a beggar, one named Heli, who would from time to time seek the hills and shores of Galilee. The stranger noted the lovely light in the boy's face and how he hearkened eagerly to the wonder tales of the wilderness told by this bronzed outcast. So he questioned the youth and drew him aside, finding his answers curious and powerful, having an edge and sharpness that delighted his inquiring soul.

He told Jesus to call him 'the Man of Egypt', as he was born in that land. "My parents were Greeks," he declared; "but the land of a man's birth, the country in which he passes his first years, sets its own colours and its seal upon him. So I am an Egyptian though I be Greek. I have journeyed through many lands, and I find that the Jews alone are not thus changed by country and by the people with whom they abide. They are a peculiar and a great people for this reason. And I would study them now before I return to my own place.

"It is because they worship the one true God that they are not changed by country or by circumstance. They are bound together in this one worship, this hone holy belief; and it will endure with them as the rock in this Galilean hill endureth."

The "Man of Egypt" was pleased by the boy's words and bade him and his companions meet him near the fountain, and they would make that wise commerce of talk, that eager barter wherein wisdom is exchanged. This Gentile knew not whether Jesus had understanding of all his meaning. But he was glad when he perceived him at the meeting place, in the company of three or four other lads. It was always his practice to talk with the common people of that land in which, for a time, he dwelt. It was not from the scribes or from the wise men that this Gentile believed he could obtain knowledge. Only simple folk could render that treasure of understanding that pleased his learned mind.

Now Jesus did not know that he talked with a sage. But great was his joy in listening to the speech of this man and in opening his heart, revealing the secrets of his soul. Here was one who spoke as an elder brother might, who could give counsel and was tender and patient, never cruel in his utterance concerning those dreams of Jesus and his walks upon the hills. So these two came to love one another, and were firmly bound by that sure unity of spirit that arises from the same hunger for the truth.

The other lads did not come again to the meeting-place. They had no understanding of the words of the stranger, so only Jesus continued to traffic in this mart of wit, giving no

thought to the morrow, nor to the race of this stranger.

However, Thomas soon learned of his brother's wise friend, and he told the Scribe of their meetings, and he also told the schoolmaster that Jesus drowsed over his letters because, in the late evening, he hearkened to the lewd counsels and corrupt tales of the Greek.

The Scribe sought out Joseph, and his countenance was dark as lie spoke of the shame his

son brought upon him. "Thou knowest the Law," said Bender; "and the command 'thou shalt not rear pigs, or study the learning of the Greek.' This boy of thine offendeth grievously. See that he is punished and that he seeketh not again the company of this Gentile."

On his return from Joseph's dwelling the Scribe perceived Jesus taking leave of this stranger by the fountain. He waited until his shape could no more be seen upon the road, then he turned and reproached the boy, uttering violent and wrathful words.



CHAPTER XVIII

Now at sunset, it is the custom of the men of Nazareth to gather about the fountain or beneath the trees that are near to it and give a pleasant shade. Here they make talk, and here in this hour several of them rested from their labours. Amongst these was Clopas, a simple and honest soul who had no great liking for the Scribe. Mary, his wife, had moved him with her sayings concerning Jesus. Therefore, when he perceived the Scribe pointing the finger of scorn at the lad, and like an angry snake, hissing his venom at him, he came forward and inquired the cause of this shouting and the reason for his demand to the loiterers to set upon Jesus and beat him till he learned the evil of his ways.

Clopas was a merchant and a man of some account in Nazareth. So Benader felt compelled to give heed to his questions. He turned to the cluster of men who now encircled them and declared that Jesus had broken the Law, and had, therefore, offended against Moses and against God.

The ignorant folk who listened trembled at this accusation. For it was terrible in their eyes when made by a learned Scribe. Some among them cast baleful looks at Jesus who stood there strait and still as a forest tree. No word of defense came from his lips. There was a hush and a dignity about him that only Clopas observed; and this merchant, who dealt with the people of diverse nations, marvelled at it, reckoning for the first time that he was in the presence, not of a boy but of some being loftier and greater than the wisest of grey beards, purer and nobler than the oldest of the Jordan hermits. It was a transformation that came to Jesus only at certain times in those earlier years, or perhaps only at certain seasons could discerning eyes perceive that inner fire of the Spirit that was his alone.

Neither the Scribe nor the crowd marked it in this time; and one of them menaced the lad with a rod while another raised his hand as if to strike him to the earth. But not even this gesture shattered the encircling quiet, or broke up that stillness that hung about Jesus, causing him to remain steadfastly gazing at the raging Scribe.

Clopas was of great size and strength. He seized the arm of the striker, bidding him keep the peace. Then he turned to the Scribe, saying: "Thou hast accused the boy of sins against the Law and against God. Be just and let him answer thee. For we cannot judge or punish until we know the full account of any matter."

Now the people were afraid of Clopas because of his strength and because of his standing as a merchant. They applauded his words, and room was made so that the Scribe and Jesus faced one another in an open space that was surrounded by listeners.

Jesus raised his hand in appeal, turning to them, saying: I have not sinned, and if this Rabbi will answer my sayings I will prove to ye all that I am innocent of any offence. "

The Scribe made loud clamour when thus challenged by a stripling, calling him a Galilean fool and declaring that he would not be brought so low as to answer any questions, and again he commanded the neighbours to chastise the offender. "Then thou art afraid to render what is only justice to this child?" asked Clopas.

Nay, not afraid."

So be it. If thou hast the courage, hearken."

And because the people murmured, whispering that this was a fair demand, the Scribe must perforce face Jesus who said: "Thou hast accused me of offending against God in conversing with a Gentile."

"Yea, it is a grievous offence, inasmuch as thou comest and goest in his company. This is not the first occasion; thou hast many times offended."

Jesus answered: "Master, thou art known to be a learned man. Wherefore I would learn of thee whether it is not true that God hath created the world and all that is in it?"

"Yea, that is so. But speak not the Great Name again. For thy soiled lips profane and blaspheme in uttering it."

Jesus sighed, but heeding not this rebuke, continued: "Then if God hath created all that is in the world He hath created men."

"Fool," cried the Scribe; "the veriest babe in Israel knoweth that God breathed fire into the nostrils of Adam, and, from the beginning, made every living thing."

"Wherefore this Gentile, who conversed with me, is a piece of God's handiwork."

The Scribe made no answer, his countenance falling awry as he perceived the purpose behind this question. But Clopas took up the saying: "Yea, truly, God having created all things living, created also this Man of Egypt."

"That being so, in what way have I offended in conversing with one who is the work of God?"

The people murmured at these words, and a stranger, the very one about whom they debated, cried from the outer edge of the circle: "Bravely said."

So eager were the listeners neither they nor the Scribe perceived the owner of the voice. Benader was disturbed and provoked by the wit of this lad. However, he would not easily yield, answering: "The handicraft of God is befouled and polluted by Satan. This Gentile, yea all Gentiles, are led away by Beelzebub as thou well knowest. Wherefore they are no more a piece of God's handiwork, and thou hast grievously sinned in speaking with one who is of the brood of Satan."

"Verily then, said Jesus, "if the Gentiles are led away, as thou declarest, by Beelzebub, they may be led back to the true path. What they have been, a marvellous work of God, they may yet be again. Is that not so? What need have those who believe, of our conversation. Doth not a shepherd leave his flock so that he may seek the sheep which are lost? And seemingly, if thou, who are revered for thy wisdom, didst speak with this Gentile as he hath demanded, though wouldst change what is ignorance or evil in his heart."

"Yea, I am prepared in this very hour to talk with thee before the people." cried the Man of Egypt, thrusting himself through the throng. And if thou dost worst me in this battle of words I will declare my ignorance and seek to abide by thine instruction and by thy sayings."

The Scribe quaked as he hearkened to this speech. For he was a coward and knew in his heart that he was shallow of wit. Wherefore now, in his craven need, he snarled like a wolf, pointing a finger at the stranger, crying: "Behold the Greek who hath corrupted this boy, who is come among us to lead our children astray and cause them to worship false Gods. Set upon him on the instant. Drive him forth from Nazareth, else he will be the cause of the backsliding of many. And no one can tell what hurt or harm he will bring upon our sons; drawing them down into that pit of abomination and desolation spoken of by the prophets."

Clopas sought to stay the hands of those men who were about him. But numbers of other folk had gathered while the Scribe and the boy thus debated. They did not know the beginning of this dispute but they revered the Scribe, who was of Jerusalem, and therefore, had a great name among them. They obeyed his command, gathering about the stranger, making fierce clamor, throwing stones at him, so that he was compelled to flee, and the crowd followed like dogs upon his heels.

After a time there remained by the fountain only the Scribe, Jesus and Joseph who had come in haste on learning from Thomas that his brother was uttering lewd sayings and insulting the Scribe. Weighty were the accusations, and false speeches were set in the mouth of the boy. These caused Joseph to gather up the dust from the road and cast it upon his head; yea more, he beat his breast and prayed for pardon.

Benader commanded Joseph to chastise his son with the rod and compel the child to fast and to keep him within his workshop, labouring at carpentry. And this timorous man promised to obey him, leading Jesus away with bowed head.

When they were come to the little hut he put all the children who were within outside the door. Then summoning his wife he recounted the tale of accusations made by the Scribe.

She hearkened in silence; and Joseph having finished, her piteous gaze searched the boy's face while her lips sorrowfully murmured: "Is this true? Can any son of mine have so blasphemed? Hast thou truly performed this evil? Art thou so utterly gone astray that thou canst thus openly defile the Holy Name?"

And Jesus cried out: "Nay, mother, the accusations made by the Scribe are false. He hath lied in all save one particular. It is true I have conversed with a Greek. But this man spake only of the good to me. He is a sage, and I have gained much by walking and talking with him."

"If the Scribe accused thee falsely," said Joseph, "why didn't thou not deny these charges?"

"Of what avail would be such denial? Thou believest Benader is a man who utters truth. 'He cannot lie!' Such were your words."

"This Gentile hath corrupted thy heart. Thou art utterly gone astray," Joseph lamented. And though Jesus strove to win him with further argument the simple carpenter would not accept his declarations, and thinking of the Scribe's command, smote his son with the rod till he was wearied.

From that hour the child shrunk away from Joseph. His bruises swiftly healed, but the hurt done to his trusting soul did not heal. When she visited her brother, Mary Clopas perceived that the great wrong lay in the blow that had been dealt out to that loving tenderness that Jesus possessed in such great measure for his mother and his father. They would not believe his word; they chose to accept the lying statements of this ancient Scribe. And Mary spoke at length of the shame brought upon them among the neighbours; and this was a true saying. Their looks were cold, heavy their displeasure, they bade their boys hold aloof from Jesus, so that for a time, he walked apart and alone.

Clopas had been summoned to Caesarea Philippi on the eve of the tumult. It was not until his return that he learned from his wife of the evil done to the child through the wicked sayings of the Scribe. And Clopas went to Joseph and declared the true chronicle of that day, speaking with such firmness that the carpenter and Mary must perforce believe his words.

"But that doth not heal the hurt," said Joseph; "even though the Scribe hath lied he is one who speaketh with authority and is held in esteem by the people. Jesus should not have set himself up against such a man. Neighbours who would have given me work, have turned their faces from me. I have lost the respect of men, and time must pass ere we hold up our heads before the people."

"Thou dost mourn for the things of this world," said Clopas. "Are they of such account?"

"Nay, they count for naught," cried Mary.

"And I, who must earn the bread for my children, say that they count for much," answered Joseph.

 he spoke Jesus entered the hut. And Clopas perceived that the first sorrow of youth had set its mark upon his countenance. But even as he moved towards Joseph declaring a message given him, Mary gathered the boy to her, and kissed him again and yet again, tears flowing softly from her shining eyes.

And these two, mother and son, were one in that hour.

CHAPTER XIX

A little store of money was hid beneath the stone of the hearth. One by one the pieces had been added to it in the toilsome months, and at last, enough was gathered. Counting his slender treasure again, Joseph perceived that his purpose was accomplished. In company with Mary he might go up to Jerusalem to attend the festival of the Passover. For two years they had denied themselves this great joy, trade having fallen away and there being other

mouths to feed, the baby sisters of Jesus to cherish. However, these might now be left in the care of the old women. And chance in a gift of money from a stranger, who liked certain carvings shaped by Joseph, led to there being a sufficiency for three travelers.

Now since Jesus could walk and talk Mary had spoken to him of that wondrous time when her first born might accompany her on this pilgrimage and witness the glory of the Great

City. On learning that this dream might in the coming year be fulfilled, she declared:

"This increase of money sheweth that the hand of God is in it; inasmuch as Jesus is of an age when he should go with us. This journey will set him up once more among the neighbours. When he comes back they will not cast baleful looks at him, and the other lads will make friends with him again."

"Nay, Thomas shall go with us to Jerusalem," said Joseph in a loud voice. And the two boys, who were planing wood within the workshop, paused to hearken to his words.

"Thomas is the younger of these twain. Let him wait his turn," answered Mary.

Nay, Jesus shall not go with us for the great festival. I have sound reasons for this determination. He would shame us in the Temple with his ignorance. The friends and kin whom we will meet will ask: 'who is this dull witted boy?' and we shall not be able to make any defense of him."

"But your sister says his mind is as bright as a bird's, that his understanding is as the deep Well of Nazareth. It may not be plumbed."

"Nay, but it is like the dry Well of Bethany that is a cause for sorrow to the camel drivers who vainly seek water in it at the end of summer. The boy is wholly without knowledge. The schoolmaster told me that he doth not yet know any of his letters. Not one word can he read from the Holy Book. In a week's time he will choose one from among the lads for the task of reader to the old men. This chance, he declareth, will fall to Thomas. Wherefore, because he is such an excellent scholar he shall go up to Jerusalem in place of Jesus. Nay, more, the schoolmaster maintaineth that Jesus is still at times possessed by a demon, and on learning of our desire to journey to the festival, hath promised me that the demons will seize upon Jesus in the very courts of the Temple and cause him to make a blasphemous uproar."

"The schoolmaster hath a dark heart. No sweet thing cometh from it," cried Mary. "He hath been hard on Jesus ever since the day the boy twitted the Scribe. Accept not, therefore, his judgment in such a matter."

"But thou canst not deny that Jesus hath failed to read one word of the Holy Book. All the lads will tell you that he knoweth not his letters."

Mary was greatly troubled in spirit, for she could make no answer to this charge. Mary Clopas had, of late, greatly praised her son and called to her remembrance those old days when the people held her to be strange because she was different from them, because she had known the high ecstasy of walking with her Lord. So her joy in Jesus was kindled again into a bright flame, and he was once more her beloved, the wonder and the blossom of her dreaming youth.

She now perceived that he, as well as Thomas, had heard Joseph's words, and that he had leant forward over his tools like a willow bent and cracked by a blustering wind. She nbled, his sorrow flowing into her soul and filling it with mourning. Despite her many cares she had observed these boys and knew that what was the heart's desire for Jesus was but an occasion for delight to Thomas.

However, Joseph was a man of obstinate temper. He would not easily be gainsaid. Therefore, she determined to seek the counsel of her wise sister, Mary Clopas.

CHAPTER XX

As the boys of his own age would not, for fear of the Scribe, walk or talk with him, Jesus sought the company of the little children, and in his hours of freedom, played with them in the fields of Galilee.

They all loved this bigger boy, who dealt so tenderly with them, gathered flowers, leaves and stones, building and shaping them for their delight. At other times he would carry

the smallest of these little ones upon his back, or he would summon those who were weary about him. Sitting down in a wide circle, they would hearken to the tales he diligently plaited for them out of his fancies.

Clopas discovered this little company resting beneath a plane tree, and she too hearkened eagerly, taking pleasure in the stories told of Paradise and of the angels who watched by

each small child, guarding him from hunger and from all hurt. When the tale was ended and the children scattered, she spoke with the boy, taking his arm and talking with him of those past troubles, learning of his present sorrow. He yearned to go up to Jerusalem and was wholly cast down because this promise, made by his mother, had been broken.

"I would not go in the place of Thomas," he cried. "But I am sorrowful indeed because I may not be one of the pilgrims in this coming year. It was promised me not only by my mother, but by another who walked with me in the early day." At first he would not name that other. However, when Mary Clopas disclosed her knowledge of his vigils on the hills he confessed that a prophet had appeared to him there in the dawn, and had told him he would go up to Jerusalem in the coming year.

Mary Clopas marvelled not a little at this simple saying of Jesus. Now that it came from his own lips she found it hard to believe and wondered whether he had but slept and dreamed upon the hilltop in the early day.

In the morning that followed her talk with Mary's firstborn, she awoke before the dark broke, before the eastern bowmen's arrows of light pierced the mists. And it seemed that a voice called her; so that she arose, and stepping softly among her sleeping children, passed out into the garden. There she stood for an instant listening; then, still drawn by that voice, which seemed to call yet made no sound, she climbed the narrow street, and after it, the hill that rises above the town. Soon she heard footsteps, and knew that some lad clambered up the same steep way.

Her heart no longer doubted; she pressed forward, not halting until she reached a little grove near the brow of the hill. Beyond it was an open space, and as she waited there in the darkness the skirts of night were rolled away, silently vanishing into the western skies.

In that first greyness the figure of Jesus stood out straightly. For an hour or more there was no stir, no sign that he breathed or lived, and always the sunrise gathered more gloriously in the heavens. Golden lights and dark shadows spread about the boy. A floor of many coloured flowers stretched away at his feet. Larks sang above him. A blue blackbird perched upon his shoulder, then lightly darting from it, set itself upon a blade of grass so airily it did not bow beneath the gay singer's weight. Turtle-doves drew near to him, calling one to another. Tortoises, with soft bright eyes, crept to and from the stream that babbled by. Not one of these living creatures was afraid of Jesus. They looked at him as a trusty friend, singing, crying and twittering beside him, fetching and feeding their young, making a strange joy and gladness about the quiet figure of the lad.

Of a sudden all was changed for Mary. She no more perceived the birds, the flowers and the stirring grasses. A white bearded ancient stood beside the boy who lifted up his face to him. Together they conversed, and gazing upon the stranger, Mary Clopas knew that she looked upon an angel or on one who was the servant of Michael or Gabriel. Yea, verily a prophet. She could doubt no more. She had judged truly. Jesus was, as he had declared to James, a son of God. How else could he commune thus in the dawn with an ancient prophet of Israel?

The watching woman fell upon her face. When she looked again both the boy and the spirit were gone from her sight. And in that hour, as she gazed out over the blue sea of Galilee, she knew in her heart that Jesus was one of the chosen and might, in deed and in truth, some day be a great master in Israel.

CHAPTER XXI

Like a wolf nosing round a fold of sheep the old schoolmaster paced up and down and about the lads of Nazareth. All fastened fearful eyes upon him, waiting eagerly for his commands. In his hand was a rod and in his eyes was a glimmer of venom. The boys knew that the light betokened that one among them would be sorely punished before the task of their letters was ended that day.

They soon divined what lay in the pedagogue's mind, knew the choice he would make, the example of wickedness that would be set up before them all. For he paused beside Jesus, eyeing him fiercely. Any other among the boys would have quailed before his glance. Jesus reared up his head proudly, fixing his gaze upon the teacher, giving in defiant challenge an answer to the fellow's evil malice, to the cruelty of his menacing power.

Now it was the day when a certain honoured Pharisee, who was of Jerusalem, would

hearken to the reading given by the boys. And it lay with him to choose one from among them to recite the holy texts to the old men. On such a day it would be a shame and a scandal if a lad failed and stumbled in his rendering of the letters. Therefore, when the venerable guest entered the chamber and sat himself down beside the rostrum, the schoolmaster, striking his desk with a rod, summoned Jesus, sharply bidding him give the first reading from the Holy Book.

Some of the lads were sorry. They knew that Jesus was ignorant and never at any time showed skill or bright understanding of the dark images of the Hebrew tongue. He was now faced with this language, and as is commonly known, it was not the speech of the people. So the schoolmaster did not deal with any fairness when he bade him open the Book and read from the first page that met his eyes.

The lad showed no fear, and all waited in dread for the certain condemnation and the promise of correction with the rod. But as Jesus searched the page the Pharisee muttered: "A strange looking lad! peradventure he is of high birth. I like his bearing. Tell me his name and the name of his kin."

"He is the son of a poor carpenter, Rabbi," the schoolmaster answered.

"He might truly be the son of David, King of Israel. For verily, he hath the glance of an eagle and a noble mien despite his small and somewhat misshapen body." These two spoke in low voices, and the boys heard only the last words of this Pharisee. But they noted the anger such a saying as 'Son of David' roused in the schoolmaster's breast; and the two or three lads, who loved Jesus, trembled for him.

"After the departure of the Rabbi all the skin of his back will be peeled from him by the rod," thought James, and like little brooks his eyes ran out with water.

Then Jesus raised his head, and named the psalm which lay open before him.

"Yea, yea," cried the schoolmaster; "Read, read, and fumble not with any word or letter. Truly, at thine age, thou shouldst know them all."

The boy lifted up his voice, saying:

"How pleasant are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts. My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Temple. My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. The sparrow hath found a house, yea, the swallow a nest, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of Hosts."

And without halt or hesitation Jesus thus read on; such beauty and yearning in his voice for the Temple of the Lord, even the small lads were moved, and the huge bent Pharisee sat up straightly, gazing with delight upon the reader and raising his hands to shape the signs of joy. On that morning, the psalms were spoken as they had never before been uttered. The voice cried as a harp, melody upon melody springing from it. And when the schoolmaster thought to stay Jesus, silencing him, the Pharisee commanded that he should continue, as such music of speech was rare, and gave even to old age such as his, a new vision.

In the after time, telling their mothers of this hour, the boys declared that Jesus was wholly changed, that they had never seen him with such light in his eyes; nor was he, by reason of that wondrous voice, Jesus the small and wicked boy any more. James alone had understanding of it. For he called to mind those hours passed upon the hills above Nazareth, but he held his peace concerning them.

When at last the reading was ended, the Book closed, the Pharisee beckoned to Jesus, and on the boy drawing near to him, asked for his arm so that he might lean upon it. Then rising, he turned to the schoolmaster, saying: "I would hearken to no other. Would this child were ever at my elbow, so that I might delight in the spell of his voice. I would learn more of the soul behind such a pleasant instrument. For it is the soul and not the utterance itself that giveth loveliness to the holy words."

His robes sweeping the stones, the stately Pharisee passed out into the sunlight in the

company of Jesus; and together they walked up and down the grassy way, the old man talking eagerly, the youth making soft and gentle answer.

And the simple folk of Nazareth, who passed by in that hour, marvelled when they perceived this great master of Israel thus honouring "the foolish and wicked son of the carpenter." In this fashion did the friends of the Scribe speak of Jesus.

Within the house the schoolmaster raged, smiting the boys that remained with wrathful words and with those blows of the rod he might not now deal out to Jesus. In his heart he knew that, with this hour, his reign of authority over the lad had ended. There was gnashing of teeth, for the children of darkness love the power given them over the children of light.

And before the Pharisee bade the lad farewell he conjured him, if he were ever at Jerusalem, to seek him out in the courts of the Temple.

"I fear that I shall not now see them till I am grown, said the boy sadly.

"The years, alas, run speedily by, at least for me," the old man answered. "I shall watch for thee, Jesus. I would hearken again to the lute thou carriest in thy breast and to the wise words it sounds."

"Yea, master, I shall remember." And Jesus bowed his head.

CHAPTER XXII

Mary washed clothes in the stream, but sang no song. For she must continually watch her babes who played and rolled in the grasses while her fingers twisted and turned the garments in her hands. Care marked the pale brow and weariness was shewn in the slow movements of her limbs. She had laboured early and late, so that there should be the needful provision of money for this journey to Jerusalem. Now, all pleasure in the thought of it was gone from her, as she could not banish from remembrance the sad face of Jesus and the hard, yet seemingly true words spoken by Joseph concerning his ignorance of the letters.

It was warm even in this tree sheltered place. She laid down the linen, resting an instant, looking towards Nazareth. The rushes near the path gave way; a grave swan that swam within the pool bordering them started up, crying and beating its wings, for a woman came in haste. Her hair was disordered, her veil awry. She did not heed these things, calling as she ran: "I have strange tidings for thee, tidings that will make thy heart leap with joy."

"Nay on this day the door of joy is closed to me," Mary answered.

"Then I will speedily open it again," cried Mary Clopas. "Put all vexation from thee and be glad, because thou art the mother of one who will be a mighty prophet in Israel."

"That cannot be. Thou art a weaver of fables."

"Nay: I have seen, I have heard. Wherefore I know."

"Nay, what joy can come to me now, inasmuch as Jesus grieveth me sore."

"I will speak of him. Mary, I saw this boy of thine on the hills in the early day, and because of his strange mien I watched by him. And behold, there came a great wonder out of Heaven, a white-robed shape descended to the earth and stood beside Jesus. And lo, the two conversed with one another. Gazing more closely I perceived a sage who leant upon his staff and gave to thy first-born wise counsel."

"Yea, yea," cried Mary. "What of it? Who was this man?"

"Not a man truly, but Elias."

"How could Elias converse with a son of mine? How dost thou know that it was Elias?"

"By the radiance about him, by his white beard, and the strange peace he bore with him. Even the birds were hushed in their song."

"Wert thou alone?"

"Yea, alone."

"Forgive me, but I doubt this marvel. Thou hast surely slept and dreamed upon the hill in the early day. Nay, I cannot believe . . . a boy who knoweth not his letters, a lad the Scribe declareth is a shame to Nazareth, whom the schoolmaster calleth a fool, by reason of his dull wits."

"But he communeth with the angels, with the prophets. Of that I am assured. He possesseth that gift of God that once was thine. Dost thou not remember Gabriel? Wilt thou not call to mind the Invisible Father who walked with thee upon the lonely hills? Hast thou blotted out the memory of the promised Messiah?"

"I cannot blot out the sorrow those hours rendered to me. I have but gathered thorns from those times when, in my foolishness, I sought the high vision."

"But if thou dost believe that Gabriel spake with thee then, thou wilt believe that Elias speaketh with thy first-born, who is truly in thine own image, and as pure as thou are pure?"

Mary cast the linen from her and hid her eyes in her hands. For a time she wept bitterly, and when her sister prayed her to declare the cause of these tears she answered: "I weep because Gabriel hath not, since those days, appeared again to me. I weep because I fear for Jesus. I have suffered much through those visions of my early youth, and assuredly, Jesus will suffer also. I would have him, therefore, as other boys."

"Nay, nay, he will be a glory to thee. We cannot fathom yet that wisdom, which I believe lieth deep within his understanding. But I come to pray thee to suffer Clopas and myself to take him with us to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover."

"Truly, thou hast a good heart. But Joseph would not permit me to waste thy few pieces of money upon the lad in this fashion. He will receive no gifts from any man. He is proud."

"Nay, we believe in Jesus. Wherefore we hold it as no gift, but as an offering to the Lord."

"Then come with me to the workshop and speak to thy brother and thou mayest prevail with him."

Whereupon the two women gathered up the linen and the babes in their arms and returned to Nazareth.

Joseph was planing the lintel of a door and in no humour to hearken to the words of Mary Clopas. He declared again that Jesus had shamed him in the school by reason of his sluggish wits, by reason of his foolish ignorance. He would not suffer him to go upon the pilgrimage.

Even as he spoke neighbours crowded into the workshop making wild talk, asking strange questions, praising Joseph because of the honour his son had received from the revered Pharisee.

One goodwife cried: "This Rabbi declareth that thou art of the lineage of David, inasmuch as Jesus is in the likeness of the kings."

Another cried: "Yea, more, he hath said that no scribe in Jerusalem could read the Scriptures with greater eloquence."

"He is to be as the learned Hillel and instruct us all when he is grown. Such are the words of the great Rabbi," cried a third.

Now while they made this clamour Mary softly communed with Mary Clopas. "I will borrow the pieces of money from thee. Jesus shall assuredly go to the Festival. Even if Joseph still forbid it he shall go. I will spin for the neighbours in the first hour of the day and labour for the repayment of this debt. Verily, Mary, I am glad and rejoice because thou hast given me back all that I have lost."

"Then thou dost not doubt any more that Jesus spake with Elias?"

"Nay, I have no more doubts. And never again shall I sorrow or be cast down. For the promise made me by Gabriel will be fulfilled. Peradventure, he truly spake with me and was not, as many have declared, a lying and mischievous spirit."

As the women spoke together they lifted up their eyes and, beheld Jesus. His mother hastened to him, laying her hands upon his shoulders, saying: "Son, thou art the delight

of my soul. Thou art the pride of all my days. Together we shall go up to Jerusalem for the feast and thou shalt perceive its streets, the golden Temple with its white courts. And therein thou shalt learn to be a man and shalt make thine offering. Verily, God shall prosper our journey and I shall be glad as never before as I go up to Zion's city in the company of my two strong sons.

Mary embraced Jesus, and they remained with one another while she spoke of the

pilgrimage and murmured words of love in his ears.

Later, when Joseph summoned her, she set Jesus one last question. "Son, I am puzzled. Wherefore didst thou in past days show such ignorance of thy letters, and then of a sudden thou didst read the Holy Books as perfectly as a wise and elderly scribe?"

"How could I in past days heed my letters when my Father would converse with me?"

"Nay, but in the hours when thou wert within the schoolhouse thy father was not with thee," Mary answered, perplexity sounding in her voice.

'Yea, in those very hours. For my Father is within me. Am I not His son?"

Joseph called again, so Mary could not tarry and seek to unravel this saying. But as she passed by Mary Clopas she whispered: "Again that strangeness which vexeth Joseph. At times the boy speaketh thus, and it setteth him apart, and truly, we like it not."

"Ye like it not," her sister answered, "because ye have no understanding of such sayings. But I hold that they are a sign and a token that God hath set His seal upon thy son's brow and a high destiny will be his in the coming times."

 d at these words Mary took heart once more.

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CHAPTER XXIII

The pedagogue sought out the lads of Nazareth, and found a cluster of them here, a cluster there; and to them all he spoke after the same fashion.

"Ye have told your fathers fables concerning the words spoken by the great Rabbi. Wherefore, if ye do not deny them and declare they were but foolishness, I will pull your nose and your ears; I will deal furiously with ye."

Knowing the temper of the pedagogue the boys trembled, saying: "Yea, we will do as thou hast bidden us." And they went forthwith to their kin and made excuses, declaring that they had told idle tales, not having a true understanding of the speech of the Rabbi.

So the talk changed in Nazareth, Jesus was no more a wonder to the people. Again sour sayings concerning him passed from mouth to mouth. And these all sprang, like a serpent's brood, from the lips of the pedagogue and the Scribe of Nazareth.

Joseph would not, therefore, continue to glory in the excellence of Jesus in company with his mother. In truth Joseph bade her hold her peace. But he showed kindness to the lad, so Mary's mind was at rest at last.

Now Heli, the beggar, returned from his wanderings in the wilderness, and was once more seen sitting beside the great road in his dusty tattered garments. He had a marvellous understanding of Jesus, and these two would converse for hours together, the old man discoursing on the sun, moon and stars, on the warring kingdoms of the earth, and declaring the customs of the many coloured tribes of men that spring up throughout the world as thick as blades of corn in springtime. And he told of the outcasts who dwell in the desert places and promised that he would lead Jesus to them when he was a man. "For they are a curious people, and if thou wouldest be wise thou wilt learn more from them than from the learned scribes of Jerusalem."

Such sayings set their brand upon the memory of the boy, and he determined to seek the Tribe of the Wanderers when he was no more subject to his parents. However, after being with his mother, he forgot all save her promise and hastened to declare it to his friend and to babble of the wonders of Jerusalem and of the courts of the Temple wherein he would assuredly find again the great Rabbi who had walked with him beside the schoolhouse.

"This master promised to instruct me in all the wisdom of the Law if I were ever in Jerusalem. Wherefore, it may well be that I shall abide there and not return to Nazareth.

Truly it would be a marvel to dwell nigh to the Temple and to pass my days hearkening to the learned doctors who pass in and out of its courts."

"Nay," cried the beggar, "thou art a wild bird. Thou wilt be caged within their learning, caught as in nets of sayings; and assuredly if thou dost remain with them thy spirit will be overcome and thou shalt lose that gift of thine-the power to converse with thy heavenly

Father in the silence. Promise, therefore, to return to Nazareth. Reject the invitations of this Rabbi if he press thee to remain with him."

"Surely the courts of the Temple are as the outer gardens of Paradise," cried the boy. "What greater joy than to pass within them daily and to dwell but a stone's throw from them."

"Thou wilt discover finer joys in Galilee and greater wisdom among the wanderers who dwell in the desert places. I would not condemn Jerusalem and intercourse with the learned men who throng within that city. But only a measure of it is wholesome. It should be leavened by the measure of another life, by conversation with other men in strange places, inasmuch as learning is lathered in the by-ways as well as in the highways of the earth."

And Jesus understood these sayings of Heli and promised that he would return to Galilee in the company of his kin after the Festival.

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As the hour of departure approached, the joy that was in Mary's heart was like a blazing fire. She came and went singing and laughing, delighting in each instant of the day. Nothing could cloud her joy. For she believed again with Mary Clopas in the dreaming promise of her youth. All her love and tenderness went out to Jesus, and she would have him close beside her when they departed in the dawn for Jerusalem.

For these pilgrims, an enchanted world spread about them. The lads could not give utterance to all their delight; they questioned their elders eagerly and marvelled at the sights that met their gaze at each turn of the road.

Here was the rich vale of Esdraelon, there the stream of Kishon wherein Elias had cast the bodies of the priests of Baal smitten by him: and behold Gibeon and again mountains and valleys. ... Other tales of the ancient days were told by their elders until at last they wearied, bidding the youths to cease questioning them.

There came a change as the little company drew near to Jerusalem. The sun was setting when they entered dark ways somber as the roads about death; and they perceived above them only dimming strips of sky while about them muttered and cried black waters that leaped from the rocks. A shadow fell across the mind of Jesus as they entered the Valley of Tears. He gazed upon the many tombs carved in its stony sides and his thoughts bent themselves upon the swift passage of the lives of men. "They are but as birds that drift down these long valleys in the fading light. How swiftly they pass beyond our ken, and are lost in the darkness of these parched and withered ways." He spoke thus to James, then became silent, for his heart again glowed with the joy of the morrow when his eyes would alight upon the walls of Jerusalem and the golden Temple of the Great King.

 James asked him how it was that his face was glad when his feet were sore and all his bones weary from the heavy journey.

He answered: "The angels in Paradise cannot rejoice more than I do now because I bethink me of what shall be revealed to us on the morrow."

CHAPTER XXIV

A cold wind blew over the bare hills, and the skies were clouded in the early day. James was a little lad, and he trembled, as the company, softly singing, drew near to Jerusalem. He clutched at the hand of Jesus, who was a bigger boy, murmuring: "I am afraid. Hold fast to me." And there was reason for fearfulness.

Round about the walls of the city stood scores of crosses, each one weighted with a dead or dying man. Vultures gathered about some of them, plucking at the dead with their great beaks. Others, that still held living bodies, were even more fearsome, as the men upon them groaned and lamented, sweat standing upon their brows.

And James clung still closer to Jesus, gazing up at him.

He stood very still, whiteness spreading over his youthful countenance, sadness darkening his brow as he cried out wildly: "So this is the City of my Father."

No man or woman among the pilgrims heeded this mournful cry. For all joined together,

breaking gladly into a psalm of praise, making joyful melodies as they raised their hands in greeting to the Temple of Gold wherein God dwelled.

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The company, led by Clopas and by Joseph, found lodgment in a crooked street. They were thankful to lie upon earth and dung in a foul den, which was not, even at noon, lightened by the sun of heaven.

Sorrow passes oft-times in a gracious sleep. In the early morning when little James awoke he gazed upon the face of Jesus, who had lain beside him, and perceived that he was glad.

The smile of day drove hence the dark figures of the dusk. These rested no more in the understanding of the lads. When the two had received a share of bread from their mothers they went out, wandering up and down the narrow lanes speaking of the joy of that vision of the Temple which would soon be theirs. Even as they sought for the glimmer of its roofs against the strip of blue sky that stretched between the high walls, they came upon pilgrims who had lain all night on the cold stones. Here were bearded Jews from beyond the Euphrates, and there were travelers from Antioch and Asia. Women, lads and men, with weary eyes, rose up from their resting places. Hunger was written upon the faces of many of them; but the light of hope and dream shone from all. They were going up to Zion's Temple wherefore it was the hour of exultation, the hour of freedom from the yoke of Roman rule. Within certain courts of the Temple only the children of Israel might dwell and pray. No Gentile, not even the proudest Roman ruler might penetrate those guarded places. So the hearts of all these strangers were lifted up; and James and Jesus were glad because they were glad.

However, a woman, who bore a babe in her arms, wept and cast down her head. She rested against the wall of a house; and even as she strove to rise she fell back moaning, saying to her husband: "I cannot walk by reason of my weariness and my long fasting. My breasts are dry so I cannot give suck to the babe. Let me lie. Go to the Temple and make thine offering of prayer."

The brows of her husband were dark with anger, and he spoke to those pilgrims near him, saying: "We are poor people, yet as we entered Jerusalem in the crowd of strangers yester-eve, we were robbed of the few pence we carried. Wherefore, I beg of ye a little bread or a penny so that my wife may be fed."

"We have eaten our food," said one, "not a crumb remaineth."

"I dare not spend the small share of money I bear with me," said another, "else will my boy and my wife faint with hunger."

One by one these pilgrims made excuses, and there was reason in their refusal, as they had barely what was sufficient for their needs, and knew that even so they would suffer many hardships before they returned to their own place. Also they would not deny their Lord the offering they should make in the Temple.

And the babe lamented and the woman wept. But the people rose up, not heeding them, seeking the winding way to the Glory, to the Holy Home of God.

When the street was emptied of all save the distressed man and his wife Jesus went to her and offered the share of bread which was all he would have to eat in that long day. The woman seized it eagerly, saying nothing, tearing at it with her teeth even as a wolf at prey in winter time. But afterwards, when she had eaten, the husband, a stem Jew, fierce of countenance, turned to the lad, blessing him, saying: "Better than an offering in the Temple, little master, is this gift of thine."

Speaking no word, Jesus turned upon his heel, hastening down the street so that James must run beside him if he would remain in his company. "Tell not my mother of what I have done." Such was his bidding.

"Thou wilt, peradventure, faint in the Temple then," cried James. "And behold, I have

eaten my share so I can give thee naught."

"Nay, my Father will feed me and give me power."

"Thy father will be angered against thee if he learns that thou hast disobeyed him. Did he not straightly forbid thee to give thy share of bread to any stranger? He bade thee remember that many score of pilgrims would be without food, and he said to thy mother:

'Guard our little store; we can scarce feed ourselves, wherefore we must not feed others.' "

And Jesus answered: "I speak of my Father in Heaven. He bade me give this woman my share of bread. In these matters neither father, mother, scribe nor Pharisee shall command. Know that for me there is but one will. I yield obedience to the will of the Father who is within me. No earthly father hath authority, may judge in what concerns me alone."

James was silenced by the glance of Jesus, and for the first time he was fearful, afraid of being alone in his company. For it seemed as if his playmate, the lad he loved, was removed from him, and a stranger walked in his place. James obeyed his father and mother and he loved Jesus, believing him to be holy and without stain; but now he doubted. It seemed as if Jesus had wicked and unruly thoughts, that he sought to break the commandment that James had been taught, enjoining obedience to his parents in all things.

But in a short while, the wings of his understanding took flight and bore him into the realms of great marvels, and he forgot all in the sight of the pillars of the Temple, the shining towers of God's house.

Like swift flowing rivers the pilgrims streamed from the wizened, bent and crumpled streets, passing beneath great arches, bowing low at the Portico of Solomon and before the Portico of Kings.

A babble of tongues rose in the soft air. Strange speech smote upon the hearing of the lads; and in the crowd little James pressed close against his mother, seeking the large comfort of her robes, gazing up at her veiled countenance. For a time he forgot Jesus, but later in the court where were the money changers, he perceived his comrade again. And he noted that his face was strange, that there was bewilderment upon it; and, on the little lad drawing near to him, he whispered in his ear: "Behold, the day shall come when this commerce within my Father's House shall bring ruin to it, when the covetous people shall barter no more; and these pillars shall shake and trembling fall, the great stones crashing into the paved ways. And death shall devour these men, who buy and sell, even as the locusts in a cloud devour all green things, turning a hillside into a desert."

"Thou speakest naughtiness. Thou wilt be cast into prison if thou dost not hold thy piece," lamented little James, tears of fear gathering in his eyes.

Gazing down and perceiving them, Jesus smiled and gently took his hand within his own. "Nay, nay, be not afraid. My time is not yet come." Then he uttered jesting sayings that drove away the tears and caused the lad to laugh and to rejoice. So with glad heart and merry countenance these two boys went with their fathers to the inner courts which the women may not enter.

The hours of thanksgiving, the hours of prayer and the making of offerings all gave joy to Jesus and to James. They were stirred by the marvel of the lofty courts, the cloud of incense, the glittering robes of priests; by the dim hallowed places; by the worship of the hundreds of the faithful who came from so many lands.

Noon had passed and they were weary. They stood watching the throng while their fathers sought the women once more. And of a sudden the crowd opened and a stout and aged Pharisee walked with stately carriage scarce twelve cubits from them.

Jesus whispered in the ear of James: "Behold my friend, the Pharisee. 'Bide here till our fathers come again. Tell them I speak with the noble Pharisee who was in Nazareth.' "

The lad bowed his head in assent, and wondered at the boldness of his cousin as he passed across the court and spoke to the Pharisee.

And the grey beard smiled and took the lad by the hand, uttering kindly words, leading him within. Being greatly stirred by the sight of this favour, James gave no more thought to duty or obedience to his parents, but hastened after the Pharisee and his following scribes.

They halted in a lofty chamber wherein were but a few of the guard of the Temple and certain elders in many coloured robes. Drawing Jesus aside the Pharisee continued to converse; and the followers, who awaited his pleasure, gathered near to him, reverence for his air of authority in all their bearing. But they did not accost him; they waited in hopes for the favour of his speech. Then a great door opened and a man came forth, crying: "Make way, make way." And there arose a murmur from the waiting people: "God's High-priest! Here he cometh. ... Make way, stand back for him."

Now the mien of the stately Pharisee changed as swiftly as a lightning graven sky. His pride vanished. He bowed his head, he lowered his proud body, almost his forehead touched the stones as the High priest halted before him. And the people withdrew, so that little James, who was half hidden behind a pillar, could not only perceive these great Rabbis, but could hear their murmured greetings.

They spoke of the malefactor Juda, of insurrection and of the discontent that might yet cause the streets of Jerusalem to run with blood and to be darkened with the bodies of the fallen. And little James was amazed as he saw that Jesus had not, as the scribes and followers, withdrawn many cubits. He remained beside the Pharisee, eagerly hearkening, his lips moving though they made no sound.

The High priest spoke on, his brows knitting together as he declared the folly of the Roman rulers. "They press me hard. In this grave hour when the maddened people may rise again and set upon the soldiers the Governor telleth me that it would mightily please the Emperor if the Roman Eagles were borne within the courts of the Temple; if some sign of the sovereignty of Rome were displayed before the multitudes who come to worship here. And there is ever the hidden menace behind his speech. In any season he may by force thrust this profanity upon us. For these Romans are devoured by the vanity of conquest. The Emperor would be hailed as master in every land. No hallowed place is safe from the filthiness of these Gentiles."

Now these two, the Priest and the Pharisee, murmured together, so that none of the elders, who waited, could hear what was uttered. Only fragments of their speech entered the understanding of little James. But suddenly Annas perceived Jesus, and his countenance darkened with wrath as he cried: "Who is this boy? Is he some spy set upon us?"

"Nay, I know him."

"He shall be seized and taken to the Secret Place."

Little James quaked in all his limbs; for he divined from the manner in which these words were uttered that the Secret Place spelt death for Jesus. But as the High priest raised his arm to sign to a servant to draw near and seize the boy, the Pharisee caught it, speaking in haste and in low tones: "He is but a child; he hath no understanding of what thou hast uttered. Be merciful."

"Nay, in these times we dare not shew mercy."

"But this lad Jesus is a stripling from Nazareth who knoweth naught of the troubles of the world. He has come for the first time to Jerusalem on this day of festival." And the Pharisee whispered the tale of his encounter with the boy in Nazareth; and so eloquent was his pleading the anger passed even as a gusty wind.

With a mocking smile the Priest turned to Jesus: I am told that thou didst, in an hour, utter more wise sayings to this Rabbi than the scribes declare in a year in his hearing in Jerusalem. Who doth instruct thee, boy?"

"My Father."

'Verily then, his light has been hidden under a bushel. Wisdom is rare, and those who possess even a scanty measure, declare it from the roof tops. I would now have the comfort of one wise saying. For many years have rolled away since wisdom was imparted to me."

Even James perceived that this great Rabbi mocked and sought but to thrust at the Pharisee by making a sport of Jesus.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

These words caused a change in the mien of the Priest, for they struck at the heart of his past speech with the Pharisee concerning Roman rule.

"That is well said, boy; but the task is heavy for those who would hold the peace for all. Can we remain peacemakers when the enemy beareth a sword against us?"

"Thou shalt love thine enemies and bless them that persecute thee."

At these words of Jesus Annas threw back his head, and from out his bushy beard there came a great laugh that echoed through all that lofty chamber. "Boy, thou art a dreamer who truly livest, as the Rabbi hath said, in a little village far from the knowledge of men. Did not Moses declare the Word of God-'An eye for an eye, a life for a life'?"

"Yea, Rabbi; but is it true wisdom to take vengeance, inasmuch as the vengeance may strike back upon thee? Thou wilt never win the goodwill of the conqueror with thy hate; but thou mayest win it and peace through thy love."

"Little counselor, thou knowest not mankind," sighed the old Priest. "Thou mayest be wise; but wisdom and folly dwell together. Wherefore, if thou wert a ruler thy wisdom would soon lead thy people to destruction. When they perceive lambs, wolves do not consider the love these gentle creatures might offer them. They fall upon their prey, devouring them."

"Even the wolf may be tamed," said Jesus. "Is it not written in the Scriptures 'the wolf shall he down with the lamb'?"

"Yea, but the prophet spake not of this age, alas. Howbeit, thou art quick of wit, and I like thy reasoning well, even if it be the fruit of dreams. But tell me, if the conqueror cometh to thee with a sword in his hand, must thou not barter with him, surrender a little here, a little there, for the well being of thy people? For the bearer of the sword is master in this rude age. Thou mayest scorn his beliefs, his corrupt life and his foolish understanding, but he can compel thee to hearken with the aid of his blade."

Jesus looked boldly into the face of the High priest before whom all trembled; and the boy's gaze searched for that secret trouble which lay behind this speech.

"In what pertaineth to the spirit thou shalt call no man master save God alone."

If this Galilean youth had smitten the face of Annas he could not have caused him greater astonishment. "Call no man master save God alone." Such was the elder's broken murmur. "Would that these simple words could be as easily fulfilled as they are uttered."

For a time the two faced one another, sorrow on the face of this Ruler; then suddenly, as if he had forgotten himself, he straightened once more his bowed head and said to the Pharisee: "I had thoughts of further speech with this strange lad; but now I desire neither to hearken to him, nor to see him again. He poisoneth the understanding with his wisdom. Such be ever the way with these dreamers of dreams. Out of their utterances comes the destruction of a whole nation, the destruction even of empire. Fear his wisdom, for what thou fearest thou wilt not follow."

With these words the High priest turned and passed down the chamber, hailing elders here and there, hearkening courteously or sternly to their plaints and their flatteries. He s no more proud; care rested on his brow, for the words of Jesus had searched his secret parts. Bitter remembrances was his. He saw again the road of truth and wisdom he had, in his youth, yearned to follow. He saw the twisting road of his past life, and so there was no more spirit left in him.

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CHAPTER XXV

It was for the sake of her own race as well as for the service of God that Mary had prayed and dreamed the great dream that she should bear the Messiah.

In those early days her nation suffered grievously at the hands of the Romans. Affronted in their faith, harried in their beliefs, tormented and ill served, they hated their Masters, and the young men plotted revolt, coming together in troops, making secret plans that would overthrow the might of Rome in Judaea and in those countries round about wherein the faithful dwelt.

And one named Juda the Gaulonite led the youth of Israel against the armed troops of Caesar. Stoutly did they do battle with the adversary but they were worsted and many hundreds slain. For a time Juda escaped vengeance, fleeing with a small troop to the hills. But at the last the Romans smote him in the field and he perished. His death did not end the strife; and at times other troops of youths rose and made assault upon Roman soldiers. These were known as the followers of 'the malefactor Juda'. For he had kindled within their breasts the flame of desire for freedom.

Now these small insurrections, this harrying of Romans, greatly enraged Quirinius, the governor, and caused the elders in high places to tremble. Those elders, who were priests of the Sanhedrin, knew that the Jews could not by violence cast out the Romans from their land. So they were fiercely set against these rebels. Certain Pharisees and certain of the priests who owed their power in the Temple to the governor, laboured to maintain peace,

so that they might remain in the place of authority bestowed on them by Rome. Amongst these was Annas, the High priest. He sought to serve two masters, to be God's High priest and, therefore, leader of the Jewish race, and to be also servant of the Emperor of Rome, and do his will in return for past and coming favours.

Costly is the price of service. Goodly was the wealth of the House of Annas. All his kin prospered by reason of his alliance with Quirinius; but his mind was not at ease. He might not sleep one night in peace. Always he was being harassed by elders, Zealots, Pharisees, Sadducees and by the commands of Rome. However, because of its great rewards he continued to hold the power by surrendering in many matters to the will of Caesar. But he knew that he erred grievously. So he was amazed when Jesus seemed to read his understanding as if it were an open scroll. Few were the sayings uttered by the lad; and it was not the great worth of their wisdom that moved the old Priest, but the rare talent of this stripling who could thus read his secret trouble and stir up bitter remembrance.

For in his youth Annas had dreamed that he would live but to serve the Lord, the Temple and his people. And he knew that daily, in many matters, he betrayed them. He was yielding much to Caesar that he should hold for the Jews. But if he refused the demands of the governor he knew that swift would be his overthrow. And the servants in the house of the High priest perceived that all was not well with their master, that he would not rest, but paced to and fro within his chamber.

An ancient scribe, who was in his counsels, went to him and dared to ask what ailed the great Rabbi; and he was astonished when Annas did not cry out at him for this boldness; but spoke softly: "An ignorant lad, who is, peradventure, a shepherd in Galilee, hath this day rebuked me and shamed me to the roots of my soul."

"He should be taken by the guard and beaten with the rods for such an offence, Rabbi."

"Nay, it may be that God sent him to me," sighed Annas. "Is it not true that I have many times held the people back from insurrection in Jerusalem? If it had not been for me the Temple might have been wantonly destroyed by vengeful Romans."

"Yea, master, thou hast served Israel well. For thou hast been ever a peacemaker."

"And, therefore, one of the children of God." The priest smiled as he called to remembrance these words of Jesus. "But I have sinned in striving to maintain peace. I have suffered the Romans to insult the faith of our fathers. I have aided them secretly when they have striven to do it hurt. I have been as subtle and twisted in my ways as the adder in the grass."

"Thou hast ever sought peace, Rabbi," continued the scribe.

"Sought it even to my dishonour. This Galilean shepherd hath summoned to my remembrance an old wise saying: 'Call no man master save God alone.' I should in what is holy, in what pertaineth to the Great Name, be commanded neither by Jew nor by Roman. And behold, to morrow Quirinius awaiteth my answer concerning the demands of Caesar that some signs of his sovereignty should be set up in the Temple. If I follow the counsel of this shepherd lad I shall seek God's will. I shall declare that His Temple is sanctified, and no Gentile shall be suffered to defile it."

"Yea, Rabbi; but thou wilt grievously offend Caesar."

"Were it not better to offend against Caesar rather than against this great saying: 'Call no man master save God alone'?"

"Thou wilt be overthrown; thy kin will lose all; thou shalt be no more High priest. Thou mayest even secretly lose thy life. Thou hast told me that thou alone didst have these conversations with the governor on this matter. There is no witness. Thou mightest, therefore, withdraw thyself, suffer the Gentile to enter the Temple, and declare later that it was not for thee to meddle with them, nor would it avail."

"Nay, that is the counsel of the serpent. If I call God my master I shall summon the

Sanhedrin, gather all the elders together and tell them what has been, under seal of secrecy, imparted to me concerning this pollution. And I shall set myself at the head of all these bretheren and shall lead them before the governor. Speaking in their name I shall declare that they will all die rather than suffer the Romans to profane the Temple."

"Nay, such counsel is madness, Rabbi."

"The mad way is the true way then. But there is a second course. I might tell Quirinius that I will do this thing if he persisteth in his design. He knoweth that if I command the elders to follow me and to give their lives for the Temple, they will obey."

"Then go to him. Though it would seem foolishness to declare this menace if thou canst not perform it."

"I must go into the presence of the governor with full intent to perform the deed else he will not believe my words." With a proud sign of his hand the High priest commanded the scribe to depart from his presence; for he would not be tempted any more by his smooth counsel."



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CHAPTER XXVI

It was the hour of sunset when the two rulers of Jerusalem stood at a window and gazed out over the city. The houses where dwelt the people were huddled together; and these two men in authority could perceive the winding narrow ways, the moving throngs that were, in the distance, no greater in their sight than the clouds of gnats that come out of earth to greet the summer sun.

"The lives of all these men he within thy power, governor," said the High priest.

"Yea, and are they not of little moment? Of what account, truly? Less than the beasts of the field, for they at least are dumb and minister to our needs. But these people all go into darkness and eternal sleep. Wherefore shouldst thou, O most noble Rabbi, so concern thyself with them and with the honour thou declarest thou dost owe them because of thine office?"

"They have been given into my charge by the Lord, my God."

"Nay, they have been given into thy hands by thy Lord, Caesar. Thou shouldst consider first thy duty towards him, even if our old esteem for each other is naught to thee."

"Caesar is in the hands of one mightier than he. To Caesar, therefore, in what concerneth the Law and the rule of the people, I render obedience. But to the Great Name I must render obedience in all that concerns His Temple and His Honour."

"It is well," said Quirinius, "that I am thy friend. For thy words savour of blasphemy against the Emperor who is in all things, Lord of earth. Wherefore he would have his sovereignty set up even in the Temple. In each land, in the palace of the people, shall be the sign of my rule,' he hath said. And behold, this Temple is the gathering place for all the Jews of the known world."

"I stand by the trust given into my hands," said the High-priest. "I shall lead all the elders before thee as I have declared. And thou knowest that the whole nation of the Jews will be behind them. So it will be needful for Caesar to slaughter everyone of the tribe of Judaea before he can pollute their Holy Place."

"If I despatch this message of thine to Caesar thou wilt lose these golden and glorious robes. Thou wilt be a man without a name in Jerusalem. For power alone giveth a name and bestoweth renown upon its bearer. Thou and all thy kin will be dispossessed and they will be no more than these people, who, like gnats, swarm in this city. It will mean also the end to my life. For life is a poor ignoble thing without power. And I too shall be dispossessed of my place as governor. Thou hast sworn friendship to me, noble Rabbi, and shown me a fine esteem. Where now is this love of thine? Where thine honour if thou dost break thine oath of friendship and betray me to the Sanhedrin, declaring what hath been told thee in perfect confidence?"

"So that I should be the tool of Rome and make the way clear for the foul design of its rulers," cried Annas; and his great body shook with wrath and with his trouble.

"Ours hath been the first friendship between Jew and Gentile," said Quirinius softly. "It hath been secret, but we have gained from it much joy. What are the destinies of the people

worth if they be compared to our destinies? We are agreed that you and I, after death, will go down into the Pit, as thou hast named it; that we shall be no more. No pain, no joy will penetrate to us. We shall be but dust. We should seek to make lovely these few years of life that remain. What use honour and thy trust to thy people if we perish so speedily?

"Let us be merry, let us delight in our great power in this, the noon of our days. Wherefore,

whether thy God or my gods have created us, it is of little account. Our duty is but to ourselves and to our children. Our children alone give us immortality. Thou wilt ruin thine and mine with this folly. Thou wilt rob me of all the joy of coming days, of that last share of life I possess. O most noble Annas, I entreat thee in the name of our children to make our last years prosperous and, therefore, joyful and full of honour. These coming seasons are all that we shall ever know or possess. Darken them not with bitterness and exile. Sacrifice honour for peace and be wise. Nay more, the right will be on thy side, for thou owest only a duty to thy children to whom thou gavest life. Rabbi, thou durst not betray them now."

Annas desired to make a long answer to this plaint and the scribe, who was waiting near to him, who hath related this hidden tale, declared that thrice he strove to speak and thrice the words failed him. Battling with himself he turned and looked forth once more.

The towered Temple shone in the sunset light. Its snowy sides glimmered in that end of day. The chanting of the priests rose up in soft murmur on the drifting breeze, and there came a sound as of the sea from Jerusalem below-many voices, many tongues, a great babel, all making one.

"It is the cry of my people," the High priest said aloud. "Behold, it cometh to me on the wind.' I must heed their crying. It is the Voice of my God that drifteth down to me on the falling breeze. I shall obey." He turned to Quirinius, speaking proudly: "I am a Jew and thou art a Gentile. We have been friends; but we cannot change the blood that flows through our bodies. We cannot change the names of our fathers before us. A great gulf is fixed between my race and thy race; and no bridge shall ever span it. I am agreed with thee that the worm, the Pit and the everlasting sleep will receive us both: that we have but the noon of our years before us. Shall it be bitter and dark or shall it be proud and glorious, For me, friend, there can be comfort in this darkness, and at least, triumph in bitterness. For no Jew of true worth can betray his God or his nation."

"But, Rabbi, thou hast in past times committed acts, in small measure such as I demand from thee now. Wherefore, thou hast already, according to thine own witness, betrayed thy race."

"Yea, but now I shall make amends. An ignorant boy, Quirinius, a shepherd lad clothed in rags spake unto me in the Temple, and his was the counsel of my God. So it seemed to me in my bitter need. This child said to me: 'Call no man master save God alone.' Wherefore, I cannot heed the command where it concerns God's House. I cannot heed the love of my children or my duty to my seed. I may not heed my debt of friendship. I must tear from my heart this secret and precious love I bear for thee. We have hidden this light from others these many seasons; and I now pray that it may not be quenched. But I am a Jew and thou art a Gentile. So I must bow my knee to my Lord, the Great Rabbi alone. In what concerneth His worship I serve Him and His chosen people. Take that as my answer. Despatch it, if thou wilt, to Caesar. I care not what be the manner of the text. My life is now ended."

Quirinius seized the hands of his friend and he wept. "Thou art a worthy servant of thy Great Rabbi. Almost am I glad at this determination of thine. Though for me also life will end when Caesar's messenger bears back the answer."

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Several seasons passed before the issue in this matter of the sign of Caesar's sovereignty was determined. The governor was first admonished and commanded to speak harshly to the High priest and to menace him with the loss of office and with grievous ill. Quirinius declared the text of Caesar's message to Annas, but he bade him stand firm. Only the scribe knew of this brave counsel of the governor. All was secret. Neither Jew nor Gentile learned of what passed between them.

When at last the governor was bidden to return to Rome other reasons were publicly declared as to the cause for his dispossession of this high office. It would not have been wise when the Jews were still of rebellious spirit to name the offence of Quirinius. So he

passed from the chronicle of the people of Judaea, cast from it by a saying uttered by "a shepherd lad" of Galilee.

Valerius Gratus, the new governor, moved with circumspection. He did not, in the first season, cast from office the High priest who was revered by the elders of Israel and loved by the people. But he found a pretext in the second season of his rule when Annas learned that another should wear his robes and rule over the Temple.

It was a sorrowful time for this man of authority. For this great Rabbi there could be no hope of a return to office. But the old desire for power remained. So he laboured to win it back through another by subtle designs; and after a space, he ruled the Temple through his son in law, Caiaphas, and so in time he was led to forget the saying: "Call no man master save God alone." In secret, he bowed the knee to Rome and also to the proud Jews of the Sanhedrin.

Therefore, when he encountered Jesus once more, he passed a cruel judgment upon him. Thus it was that the nobility of his first repentance was snuffed out as the light of a candle.



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CHAPTER XXVII

Little James stole from the shelter of the pillar. He looked neither to right nor left, creeping through that lofty chamber in the gathering shadows. His wonder at the boldness of Jesus had conquered his fear. But now not even his love for his cousin could keep him longer there. He thought of the huge Temple, of the wandering multitudes in that mighty city, and terror was his. He would rather have been lost in a wolves' cavern among the hills than in this strange wilderness. Up and down in the dusk he strayed; blood flowed from his lips, for he had bitten them to hold back his cries of fear. And at last, when he perceived his mother, he fled to her woefully wailing, biding his face once again in her comforting robes.

They questioned the lad, but could learn nothing from him concerning Jesus. For he was beset by the memory of the great figure of the High priest. It seemed that if he spoke of what he had seen he would, on the instant, be snatched away and taken to the Secret Place of fire and shadows, from which he would no more return. Terror sealed his lips, setting such dumbness upon him he could not even make a defense when Thomas said: "Father, thou didst bid me return to the pillar where stood Jesus and James; and I obeyed thy command. But Jesus and James had not obeyed thee. For I perceived them in a throng that gathered about an elder; and Jesus impudently followed this rabbi into an inner court. I could not watch both my brother and my cousin. I know not from that instant in what strange place James wandered. But I hastened forward and perceived that Jesus pressed behind this elder. Then I was much troubled, bethinking me of thy command that we should not stray to and fro, but remain straightly in the place of the gathering, beneath the pillar. Howsoever, I feared lest ill should befall my brother because of the folly that oft times riseth up in his heart; so I sought to enter this inner court. But the guard spake wrathfully to me and told me that it was an offence for the common people to seek to pass within. I must needs return and abide here for your coming. I strove to watch over Jesus, and it is not my fault that he has thus so gravely offended in entering some holy court that is set apart for the scribes."

"Thou art a good lad," said Joseph. "Would that thy brother had thy wisdom and thine obedient and worthy spirit. Truly, we are undone if he hath committed some untoward blasphemy by entering a holy place." And the two weary women lifted up their voices in soft lamentation; for they feared that some grievous harm had come to Jesus, and they loved him.

"Peace, here am I."

These words caused the little company to turn themselves about, and all fastened their gaze upon the slender shape of Jesus who stood beneath the golden light of evening that entered within that chamber.

His countenance was wondrous in its beauty. There was brightness in his eye and the nobility of a king in his glance. His conversation with the Pharisee seemed to have changed his whole being. Even Joseph was abashed, and did not speak with the violence that had been his intention on hearing the words of Thomas.

"Is it true," he demanded, "that thou hast entered some holy place and profaned it?"

"Nay, I have not profaned what is holy. Verily what is pure cannot be offended by the presence of the pure and single of heart."

"The old folly riseth once more within thee," cried Joseph. "On the instant give an account of thy doings and of the courts wherein thou didst so madly lead the boy James."

Jesus shook his head, making no answer.

Joseph spoke again, and now it was with the full heap of what he deemed to be righteous wrath. Still Jesus made no answer.

Then all the company pressed him concerning his wanderings in the past hours. But he remained silent-for he had promised the Pharisee to hold his peace.

When his kin perceived that neither anger nor pleading could draw him from out that stern silence they questioned little James again. Fear chained the lad's tongue; and lie did but sob the more as one after the other menaced him with punishment, or with soft words strove to win a confession from him.

A troubled family departed that evening from the Temple and sought again the lodging in the crooked street. Joseph deemed that, as the head of his household, he should devise some punishment which would loose the tongue of Jesus and compel him to speak. He bade Mary prepare food for all save her first born; and he declared that he should not receive his share of bread until his obstinate temper had been bent and broken to the will of his parents.

Mary vainly pleaded with her son, but he would not yield even to his mother whom he dearly loved. So she could not rest, and all the hours of the night she was beset by fear of Joseph and by a yearning to give food to her son. In the first light of dawn she arose, and perceiving that Joseph slept heavily, crept softly towards Jesus who lay beside the open door.

He was awake, his face pale in that grey dusk of day. And she whispered: "Arise, son, come without. Make no sound, so that I may give thee to eat and thou mayest be filled."

Jesus strove to obey her. But such was his weakness his body fell back once more upon the earth, and he murmured: "I am faint. I cannot rise up because of my fasting and weariness. Mother, be not troubled. Seek thy sleep again."

Now Mary was, in some matters, timorous; and she feared to rouse the anger of Joseph at any time by disobeying him, for he was a man of choleric temper. Since those early days when he had fallen down a well his health had failed, and his ailing body had played upon his spirit, setting an edge of bitterness upon humours. Therefore, Mary sought peace in obedience. But now her love for her son drove fear from her, and she stole to the side of the sleeping carpenter. Gently loosening the leather bottle of wine that was bound to his robe, she drew it from his side. Then, after resting and watching him, she rose once more, and stealing between the sleeping figures of her kin, bore the wine to Jesus. And when he had drunken a measure and partaken of bread he rose up and passed without the lodging in her company.

She said to him: "Son, I desire not to learn where thou hast been wandering in the Temple; but I beseech thee to make confession to thy father when he wakes, else these days that should be joyful for us, will be poisoned by his anger. And truly, thou owest an account of thy doings to thy father."

"Nay, mother, I have sworn not to reveal this thing. I cannot break my oath."

"To whom didst thou swear?" she cried, in dread lest he had been in some evil company.

"To one noble and wise. I may not tell thee more."

She reasoned with him again and again; and it was for his own sake that she thus pleaded. For she feared the strangeness that increased daily between Jesus and Joseph. She feared the gulf that might grow wider between them in the coming years and might be sown with the bitter thoughts of the father and with unjust deeds committed against his son.

Still Jesus remained aloof and away, saying at last: "Mother, thou conjurest me to obey the commandment that bids us honour our father. But before our father shall we not set our Heavenly Father? If I lie and break my promise I shall dishonour Him. For am I not in His Image? Wherefore, I shall remain dumb."

Mary answered: "Be it so.' But I entreat thee to watch thy ways in the coming days. Stray not again from our sight. Promise to be obedient to thy father in all things and to abide straightly by us."

And Jesus said: "I cannot promise what I may not fulfil."

"Thou owest this duty to thy parents."

"Yea, I know what I do owe to them, and I will seek to render a just account."

Even as he spoke Joseph called from within, and Mary hastened to him. She was the brave mother and no more the timorous wife and confessed that she had given Jesus a measure of the precious wine to drink, wine that had been carefully husbanded and preserved for the needs of anyone who might fall sick or faint with weariness.

Learning of this act of Mary's, Joseph was sorely displeased; and all through the day that followed there was a cloud hanging about these two. When he spoke he uttered only hard words to her. But for the most part he was silent; and his silence distressed her more than his bitter sayings. For she had, despite her many cares, a joyful spirit and took pleasure in pleasant speech with her husband, and in sharing the joy of each new happening of the day, making a delight of all those hours in that great city.

However, at heart Joseph was a just man though a man of no discernment. So when evening was come he forgave his wife and bore a gift to her as a sign that all was well between them. He could not speak of Jesus, nor did he forgive him. Again the old misunderstanding and the old shame had arisen in his soul.

"Jesus seems, at times, to be possessed by the very spirit of folly, he declared sorrowfully to Clopas, and I am ashamed of that foolishness when, as in Nazareth, it causeth him to set himself up against his elders, display his ignorance and the naughtiness of his understanding."

"Thou art like unto a sparrow who hath fledged a swallow," Clopas answered, "thou canst not follow him in his winged flights. For he is in all things differently made from thee. So judge him not lest thou dost grieve later for the judgment."

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CHAPTER XXVIII

For two days Jesus remained in his mother's company, not even for an hour departing from her side. When the men and boys drew apart, entering those courts in the Temple that were forbidden to the women, Jesus did not go with them, though James divined that he yearned to pray in those holy places. But he denied himself this joy, abiding with the women. And Mary became as some bright bird, chattering and at times softly singing, laughing and making merry. For when she, Jesus and Mary Clopas were together their great love seemed to change all things and make for them a glory of this strange, bewildering life in Jerusalem.

They went to the marketplace and watched the merchants buying and selling. Here were displayed rich embroidered cloths of many colours that delighted the eye and caused the simple Galilean women to murmur and to marvel. There were bowls of honey, bowls of grain and wine. Abundant was the display of gorgeous raiment, of food and drink, of the plenteous fruits of the fields. And while the women gazed at these spoils that came from many lands, Jesus watched the passing throng. He perceived the beggars, with hungry faces, coveting the wares of the merchants. He perceived strange Hebrews, Ethiopians, Greeks, Elamites; Jews from Arabia, Jews even from Rome. Some with faces as brown as the falling leaves, others dark as the ripening grape; youths with fair hair and pale cheeks, shepherdmen and husbandmen of great girth from the hills. All these had gathered together in this city for the festival, and as they passed to and fro, Mary perceived that her son did not seem to dream, as was often his habit when she busied herself in his company; he gazed earnestly into the face of each man and youth who passed him by. It seemed as if he made a count, so that no face was unheeded; but all measured and judged.

Mary Clopas asked him what lay in his mind, and he answered: "I seek to know the hidden life of each of these men. Upon their brow is set the seal of their integrity or their dishonour; and their eyes tell the story of their desire-whether it be for earthly or for heavenly treasure, whether it be for power or whether for the love of others. And behold, I

learn my Father's business as I read each man's desire."

"Thou art a strange lad," said his mother: "come and be glad with me. Delve no more for the secrets of the people." And Jesus was obedient to her. Together they laughed and jested, going to and fro in the sunshine, resting at last in perfect peace when they were weary. These were gracious hours for both mother and son. They rejoiced in the love they bore one another, in the sharing together of all the marvellous things they perceived. Neither

Thomas nor Joseph were present to trouble this calm, this perfect delight which was not of this earth; for it possessed in it the innocence of the first paradise.

In the evening the little Galilean company gathered together once more and spoke of the happenings of the day. One of their kin taunted Jesus, saying to Joseph, "That boy of thine will never grow into a man. For, verily he hath a womanish soul. He seeketh only their soft ways, abiding ever with his mother and thy sister."

The man laughed, making further mock of the lad, and Joseph frowned, saying: "I fear there is truth in thy words. He will neither be a skillful craftsman, nor a good father. For he should mingle with men at his age, and take a youth's part in this festival. But he seeks as thou hast said, the company of children, or he clings to the skirts of the elder women."

And Jesus said: "I would know what is hidden, I can learn as much from women and from children as from men. Nay, I learn more of certain things because they perceive life in a different manner from us. If I, who will soon be a man, do not know the innocence and beauty that lies hidden in the hearts of children and of good women I shall be indeed ignorant and poor in spirit. Wherefore, each one hath his gift for me; and it is not meet to scorn the younger or the lowlier. For the young may be great among you, and the first shall be last and the last first."

"Again thou speakest foolishly. When will this spirit of folly depart from thee?" lamented Joseph. "The Scribe of Nazareth called thee an ignorant loon who would neither be a cause for pride nor joy to thy parents; and I fear he spake but the truth. How can the last be first, the first last? Wouldst thou set children above their parents, the beggars above the elders of the Sanhedrin? For shame, son; hold thy peace and display no more thine ignorance."

Jesus opened his mouth to answer this charge, but at a sign from his mother he forbore, turning his face from Joseph and from his scornful accuser.

In a later season Mary Clopas drew Jesus aside and questioned him: "What didst thou mean by that saying, 'The first shall be last and the last first'? Dost thou truly believe that the lowly and the beggars, that the poor should be set above the rulers and the elders?"

"I spake not of this world," the lad answered, "I spake of the things of the Spirit and of the hour that is not yet come. Lo, I beheld this day a Cretan Jew, a pilgrim, who gave his scanty measure of bread to another pilgrim, whose children cried because they had naught to eat. That man, who denied himself, fasted all the day; for he had not even a penny wherewith to buy food. I watched him when he gave that bread and heard his brother reproach him for this folly. Verily, that lowly Cretan is first with God, and the rich elder who passed by those crying children, is last in the sight of our Heavenly Father."

"But goodness may reign in the hearts of some of those of high estate. Thou canst not judge them all by the niggardliness of this one elder."

"It is hard for the rich man to attain to greatness, or to perform noble deeds. For he is ensnared by his possessions. The care of them filleth his whole mind. Wherefore, he does not perceive the hungry, crying child, nor is there room in his mind for heavenly things, nor even for the love in thy heart and in my mother's heart and in little children. The ruler  the rich merchant, those who seem first with men, are oft times last with God."

Mary Clopas was silenced by these words. For she perceived that they bore in them a wisdom that was not of this world, but of another. And she drew apart, thinking of that morning on the Galilean hills when it seemed that Jesus walked with Elias; and she thought of an earlier time before the birth of Jesus when, on those same Galilean heights, Mary, his mother, walked with God.

The cloud settled once more about Joseph; and it was pain for him to be near Jesus. His strange words against the rulers and those in high places so troubled the carpenter's soul that he would break into violent and hasty speech. Fearing lest bitterness should mount up between these two, Mary spoke of the matter to Clopas. This wise trader pulled at his beard and gazed at his wife, as was his custom, when he was at a loss for a true answer. And she said: "Tell my brother that there is not room in his lodging for all the kinsfolk who

sleep in it. For these last two nights that we rest in Jerusalem let Jesus bide with us. Verily, we love the lad, and I shall find joy in his company."

So the pact was made, and they promised to watch over Jesus. Then there came a swift change in Joseph. He cast from him his sullen humours and went into the streets with Mary and Thomas in gladness of heart. Thus for a while the breach was made whole. Together the carpenter and his wife entered the Temple and wandered here and there, hailing old acquaintances, seeking tidings of the people of their tribe who, through distance, had been reft from them for many years. Then they set themselves apart and prayed, or Joseph and Thomas entered the inner courts and hearkened to the solemn chants of praise, and watched the incense rising and drifting through the sweet smelling, thickened air. Peace reigned within the little family. The three were almost as one, and their understanding was strengthened and renewed. They came out of the Temple sure that all was well for them in coming days, confident that their God abode with them.

Now Jesus remained subject to Clopas, and seemed to him gentle as the fawn which lives in the woods, but wild also and strange as the fawn. For when Clopas would seek to probe the boy's heart and to discover the root of the misunderstanding between him and Joseph, always he withdrew into himself, closed the door and would reveal nothing. However, Clopas rejoiced, because he perceived in speaking of other matters, the loveliness and strength of the boy's soul. It contained a purity and quickness of wit that caused the hours passed in his company to flee as with the speed of some strong bird that swoops over mountains, deserts and plains. In that time, the talk of Jesus yielded many visions to these two elder folk. They were as the younger, they sought the counsel of this stripling and were guided by him as they might be by a grave and revered scribe.

On the day before the departure of the Galilean company the servant of a merchant, who dwelled near Bethany, bore letters to Clopas. These demanded his presence at Bethany as soon as he might conveniently come from Jerusalem and be released from his holy duties. Clopas and his wife took counsel together. Then they spoke with a cousin and asked him to tell Joseph that they must depart a day sooner than had been designed. But they would encounter each other again at a meeting place a day's journey from the city.

Only the morning hours remained for Clopas and Mary in Jerusalem. And because of their delight in the conversation of Jesus they would not send him to Joseph in the company of their kinsman. So he remained with them till the hour of their departure.

Then Clopas conjured Jesus to seek out the crooked street and abide in the lodgings until his parents returned from the Temple. They had dallied too long, so they set out on their journey and did not, until they were no more with Jesus, perceive that he had not made any answer to their speech.

"Again Jesus was as a wild fawn," said Joseph's sister. "I fear lest when that wildness be on him he stray heedlessly and will not seek his own."

"Nay, nay, he is a good lad; he will go to the lodgings as we have bidden him. Hath he not been obedient to us in all things since being in our company?"

"Yea, that is so," Mary answered; and then she sighed, "but there are times when he speaketh of a Heavenly Father who biddeth him go here, go there; and even if such bidding be contrary to the command of his elders he obeyeth it."

Clopas laughed: "Thou art as many other mothers. Thou tormentest thyself needlessly about thy children. Assuredly all will be well with Jesus."

"Yea," whispered Mary. "He is as dear to me as one of my own children. Verily, therefore, for him I have an unquiet love that will not suffer my mind to rest when he is not in my company, or in the charge of his mother." A tender light stole into this woman's homely countenance, so that its ugliness became beauty, and she was wondrous in the sight of her husband in that hour. These two had been man and wife many years; yet at certain times there was this renewal of love and joy in one another; and no angry words spoken in heat and haste ever scarred remembrance for them.

Jesus obeyed Clopas and went to the crooked street. But the lodging was empty. And after he had tarried a while he deemed that he had fulfilled the command of his kin, and set out, once more wandering through the streets until his feet led him, as they led all strangers, to the Temple. In a later time, as he told little James, the hour of vision came to him. "My Heavenly Father compelled my acts so that I might not give thought to my mother or my father. Behold, I was bidden to seek the entrance to the court of the priests and to abide nigh to it, waiting for the sign that would declare for me my business

there."

Such were the words of Jesus, and he told James in that later season of the strange happenings that followed. Through the hours of the day many hundreds came and went in that vast Temple, and it was seldom indeed that in those moving throngs friends or kin would encounter each other unless they were so agreed. Yet Jesus had stood but for an instant near to the Court of the Priests when the Pharisee passed by him with bowed head and troubled bearing. The boy's heart leaped with delight as he gazed upon this sage. But as no counsel came to him he remained there, standing beside a pillar, not making his presence known. And he was greatly cast about lest this friend should go his way and not perceive the humble lad of Galilee. However, the elder paused at the entrance to the court, then turning, glanced behind, and his gaze lighted up, as he came forward, stretching out hands in greeting.

"Jesus, thou art my need," he murmured. Then, as if he had forgotten himself he spoke haughtily, bidding the boy follow him. They passed out of the Temple by a secret way and walked in silence till they came to the house of this Pharisee, who bade Jesus enter and told him that he would be his welcome guest.

"My kin will, peradventure, await my coming at their lodging when dusk falls."

"They shall learn that thou art in my company," said the elder. "I will despatch a servant with tidings of thee to the street in which they dwell."

Now the Pharisee's mind was filled with many cares. He forgot this promise and sent no messenger to Joseph and Mary.

Having learned of the departure of Clopas, these two believed that Jesus had gone with their kin. They were not troubled because he still remained absent; and early on the morrow they rose up, and joining the other kinsfolk, bade farewell to the Temple and set out for Galilee.

Their feet were sore, and they were bent to the earth with the weariness of the journey when they encountered Clopas, who gave them glad greeting and led them to the house of his friend.

"And where is Jesus?" asked Clopas.

"Is he not in thy company? Did we not entrust him to thee?" said Joseph.

"Nay, but he returned to thee when we departed in haste."

"That cannot be; for we have not laid eyes upon him."

"Then he hath not obeyed us, and remaineth behind in Jerusalem, straying somewhere in its streets."

At these words Mary gave a great cry. "He is gone from us. We shall see him no more. The evil men will take him captive and sell him for a slave."

And now even Joseph forgot his anger in his fear for the lad and in his trouble at the sight of Mary's woe. Vainly he strove to comfort her. In those hours of the night she could neither sleep nor rest and cried out continually: "My treasure, my beloved, I have lost him, and never again shall I see him. He has gone from me to be a slave or to be led into the ways of death by the rebellious Zealots. I would liefer have lost my right hand than that he should thus be taken. Gladly would I have plucked out an eye if it would bring him again to me." Thus Mary lamented, falling at last into a tormented sleep that caused her to toss about, moaning in her unquiet dreams.

Joseph withdrew and sought the counsel of Clopas.

"Return to Jerusalem," said the merchant. "Take my mules and journey not upon your feet. This anguish will destroy Mary if thou dost not act speedily. Verily, I knew not till now the strength of a mother's love."

"There is some strange bond between her and Jesus," said Joseph bitterly. "Yet she doth not understand the lad, and he is to me but a cause for sorrow and heaviness of soul."

"When she cometh out of this sleep we will tell her of our design," said Clopas; "and she can return to Jerusalem or rest here with us." He would not enlighten Joseph concerning Jesus, for he knew that any reasoning of his would be as wasted speech. These two, the lad and the elder man, were as sundered as if they were strangers of different nations who did not

even speak a common tongue.



CHAPTER XXX

To Mary and to Joseph the streets of Jerusalem seemed even more barren than the wilderness of Arabia. They roved hither and thither, questioning strangers, asking pilgrims if they had encountered a lad of slender build and of a brown countenance named Jesus. But no one could enlighten them. In that sorrowful time Mary and Joseph were drawn together, the years fell away, and Mary knew again the young lover who had sought her in marriage with tender words and many caresses. Thomas had remained in the charge of Clopas. For the first time for many years husband and wife were alone together. So, though their grief beset them sorely they found in one another the joy of those early days of love that had been so long gone from them.

However, when two nights and a day had passed and still there were no tidings of Jesus, Mary changed, becoming like a fading flower that droops before the sun's fierce rays. She could hardly lift her head as dusk fell on the second day and still no word or rumour of Jesus came to them. In his distraction Joseph thought of the Guild of the Craftsmen in Wood and Stone. So, being a carpenter and having, therefore, a claim upon them, he sought out their chief. Now the master craftsman was a man of great account who stood high in the esteem of the Pharisees and the priests. Joseph approached him timorously, and he was gracious and ready to hearken to the tale of the Galilean.

A fool utters his whole mind, a wise man keeps silence and hearkens to the testimony of others. Being beside himself because of his wife's grief, Joseph acted as a fool, telling the whole tale of Jesus, saying: "When he was in our company he declared that the first were last. He spoke wild words, signifying that the rulers and the elders should be held as the least among us. That even the priests and the chief of the Sanhedrin should be as those who serve."

These sayings caused the countenance of the master craftsman to fall awry. "If thy son uttered such wickedness then assuredly he is the boy who was snatched away by the Zealots who dwell like conies in the hills. Hast thou not heard the story?" And Joseph answered that no tidings of it had been borne him.

"Truly it is an evil tale, but I will not hold it back for that reason. It is reported that certain Zealots in this season of festival sought among the strangers who visited Jerusalem foolish youths who would follow them. And I have learned that they beguiled away a score of lads by declaring that they would become soldiers who would, with them, lead the people of Israel against the Romans. In this manner they led thy son Jesus and other lads away from Jerusalem to the caves wherein they hide. Know that these men do but make a cloak of their fervour for the deliverance of Israel. Their design is the robbery of the rich caravans of the merchants. Howsoever, a craftsman perceived the youths who were thus ensnared marching westward, without the city, at the break of day. Thy Jesus was one of them, inasmuch as this craftsman hath declared to me that a lad in this company called himself Jesus when he stopped to ask for water to drink. Nay, more, this lad was in the likeness of thy son even as thou hast imaged him to me in thy speech. And he spake wicked words concerning those in authority, reviling the rulers and the elders. So I fear he will in time be taken up and nailed to a tree without the walls of Jerusalem, thus rendering an account for the rich merchandise he will steal and the travelers he will slay."

At the sound of these last words Mary fell as a stone to the earth. Bending over her, Joseph lifted her up, bearing her into the house of this kindly master craftsman. His wife made much ado about her, bathing her brow, seeking with precious herbs to draw back the life within her. Only slowly Mary came again out of that swoon; and her face was changed and aged as if by ten winters. She did not speak but was obedient to the woman who attended her. She stayed that night in the house of the master craftsman. These folk desired them to remain yet another night and a day. But on the morrow Mary had

mended somewhat and besought Joseph to lead her back to Nazareth.

"There, I can bear my sorrow," she declared; "but here, in this city of stones, among these clamorous tongues, I cannot contain myself. The memory of Jesus, whom I so trusted and loved, pursueth me; and I can but image in my mind those caves wherein he dwelleth with these robbers. And I perceive only the wicked snares into which they will entrap him. For even if an angel came unto me and declared that Jesus was evil of heart, I would not

believe. But his innocence and ignorance will be his undoing. Wherefore, because I fear that tree, upon which the master craftsman declareth he will be nailed, I must go hence, else I shall perish in my bitter woe.

But before they departed, Mary consented to go once more into the Temple and pray in the company of Joseph for the deliverance of their first born from the hands of wicked men. Neither of these simple Galilean folk doubted the words of this well instructed master craftsman. He was rich and had the smooth speech of the people of the towns; and they mistook such speech for wisdom. The saying of Jesus that the first should be last, the last first, in their understanding shewed the beginning of his froward courses. Already his soul was prepared for the evil seed of rebellion that had been sown in it by the outcasts who roved the hills, watching to despoil travelers.

Dark was the day when Joseph and Mary went up the steps that led towards the Temple courts. A parched wind blew fiercely through the streets. These two trembled, and it seemed to them that even God frowned on that day of mourning for the son who was gone from them for ever.

Mary and Joseph prayed apart and alone. Joseph made an offering, and then sought out his wife once more. But now that they were within the courts of the Temple they had not the heart to go from it; and Joseph reproached himself, saying, "Peradventure, I have erred. My hasty words may have harmed Jesus, changing what was but foolishness into frowardness. My rebukes have driven him, in his wildness, to seek the company of thieves. I entreat thy pardon, Mary. Verily, I strove but to shape and mould the boy so that he should be a pride to us in our age., a good man, a good husband, and a skillful carpenter." Having uttered these words, Joseph bowed his head, dumbness sealing his lips; and now it fell upon Mary to comfort him and to strengthen him in his weakness and despair. She led him from the throng through quiet ways, and he leant upon her arm, hearkening to her whispered consolation. They were not aware of the holy places wherein their feet strayed; and it was not until a clapping of hands and the clammer of old men's voices fell on their ears, that they gazed about them and remembered that they wandered in a Temple that was holy; and therefore, in may regions of it forbidden to all save priests and elders,

They lifted up their eyes and perceived many coloured robes, old bearded faces, a gathering of venerable sages set about a slender lad who stood upon a block of stone and spoke with them.

Strange and beyond the understanding of Joseph and Mary were the questions of these elders and the wise answers of this wondrous youth. Marvelling, they drew closer, so that his face was no more in the shadow; and then, of a sudden, Mary cried out: "Behold, Jesus! Behold, my beloved!" And she thrust herself forward and would have compelled these white-bearded ancients to make a way for her to her son if Joseph had not kept her ightly, whispering: "Hold back, hold back, these are rulers, elders and scribes. We should bow to the earth before them."

So the two simple Galileans held their peace while the elders acclaimed the wisdom of the white robed child who stood in their midst, and was as a prophet, nay as one older than the prophets.

CHAPTER XXXI

In a candle lit chamber the Pharisee walked to and fro, Neither his hands nor his lips remained at rest. He muttered and murmured while his familiar scribe and the lad Jesus stood watching near the brazier. Many parchments were heaped upon a table. "In these," the elder declared, "I have vainly searched for peace. They give me naught though they be holy books. Truly, the preacher was wise. How can wisdom serve? Of what use is learning? Our people must bow the knee to the Gentile, bow the headpiece to Caesar."

Thus, for a time, the Pharisee complained; and the scribe divined that his master's

trouble was heavy indeed when he spoke of what lay upon his mind in the presence of the lad, Jesus. Being a careful and discreet steward, he drew near to the murmuring ancient, whispering: "Sir, be heedful. Betray not thy secret thoughts to this beggar boy. Let me send him from thy chamber."

The Pharisee halted and smiled as his eyes rested on Jesus. "This beggar boy? Nay, he

possesses riches uncountable and also a key wherewith he will lock within his understanding all my careless speech."

Gazing in his turn upon Jesus, the scribe perceived that strange quiet, that purity of intention in the countenance of the lad that compelled trust, that gave forth peace.

And it seemed as if the Pharisee was moved by what it gave, for he spoke aloud as if in answer to the unspoken word:

"Yea, I would know peace. Or can there ever be peace for anyone who dwelleth upon this old earth of ours?" Then he turned fiercely upon his scribe: "Go, withdraw thyself. Come, boy, sit here beside me."

The scribe withdrew into the shadows, but did not depart from the chamber. For he was bewildered by the honour his master paid to this stray wanderer he had discovered in the Temple courts.

And Jesus sat at the feet of Sichem the Pharisee who was possessed of all the hidden knowledge, and was called by some 'the standard bearer of the chosen people,' for he had often braved the wrath of the High priest and striven against him in the Sanhedrin when he would give liberties to Romans and show them favour. And now he declared the chronicle of past days and of the fears that had beset him for many seasons. "The Gentiles have conquered the people of Judaea through the might of the sword. Assuredly, they will not rest until they have conquered their understanding as well as their bodies. They will not rest until they have moulded them into their own image, changed them into Romans. Our people will not, even if they be led into captivity, surrender their faith in the one true God.

"But I would know whether there is any truth in the saying that the Messiah will come speedily, will drive the Romans out of the land and cause our people to be the rulers of the earth. Boy, in the night that is past, a dream was mine that hath twice visited me in other seasons at the time of the Festival. As I slept one came to me and bade me rise up and look upon Jerusalem. Dawn was breaking; but all the eastern lights were put out by a greater light; and all the hills around were stained with the one terrible stain. And lo, I perceived that I stood upon the Mount of Olives, and that the world below me swarmed with a great people. The cry of battle rose upon the air, and there was mourning and lamentation, and the wings of death whispered past me as I stood there. When dawn cometh it striketh first upon the Temple and its golden towers. And now I became aware of that greater light and from whence it sprang. A fire leaped about the Temple and its walls. Dark as the pit were the high heavens from the smoke that rolled across their face, from the evil night that the watching armies of Beelzebub bore with them as they hovered there. And the image of what I perceived in my dream was shaped and narrowed so that I saw only this great fire, and watched it rise and wane; and the city of Jerusalem, and the fate of its people were holden from my sight. There came the noise of many hammers and the cries of battle; and the darkness spread downwards from the skies, from Beelzebub's host. Then, for a space, I saw naught; but I might not come out of my dream, for it did not end until I had once more gazed upon the place where stood the Temple. And verily, not one stone stood upon another. Gone was the golden roof, scattered the noble pillars, fallen were its altars; and the great walls had dissolved into dust, been swallowed up by the earth. For there was no sign of them. Tell me, little lad of vision, how wouldst thou read for me this troublesome dream which thrice has visited me? The voice which accompanied it will not be gainsaid."

After a silence Jesus said: "Rabbi, that is a dream sent from God. It should bear not grief but peace to thee. I would read from it that the end of the world is at hand. The time is fulfilled. The Messiah will shortly appear, and then shall the Kingdom of God be with us. When this cometh to pass the Temple will be destroyed as thou didst perceive in thy dream. That will be one of the signs that the time is fulfilled."

"Surely the destruction of the Temple signifieth the destruction of our race?" said the Pharisee; "or, peradventure, the destruction of our faith in the Lord God of Israel? I read this dream as a sign that my old fear will shortly be fulfilled; that my people will not

perish, but will be swallowed up by the heathen and will be led to worship false gods. Wherefore, this dream bringeth to me not peace but a great heaviness."

And again the lad spoke: "I am assured that this dream is a sign that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Verily, my Father telleth me now, that in the place of the Temple shall be raised a Temple not made with hands, and it will be the glory of our people."

"That is a strange saying." The Pharisee looked at Jesus, and there was question and

astonishment in his glance. "A Temple not made with hands? Tell me, how can this be? How may we offer praise and worship to our God if the Temple of Zion is no more?"

"Is it not written," said Jesus, "that the people of the Lord shall be caught as a bull in a net; that there shall be desolation and famine in the land; that we shall be despised and rejected, and the elders put to the sword?"

"But after the time of tribulation," answered the other, "which to my mind signifieth the Roman rule, the Prophet promised that the Lord would bring again Zion; that violence should be no more heard in the land, neither should there be waste within our borders; and our priests and elders would rule mankind."

"And the same prophet declared 'the sun shall not be a light by day unto thee. Neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee. For the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. The days of thy mourning shall be ended, and thou wilt inherit the earth.'"

"Yea," said the Pharisee; "but if the Temple be destroyed and we be eaten up by the stranger, how can this be fulfilled?"

"The sun shall withdraw itself; the moon shall not give brightness any more.' What doth this signify," demanded the youth; "but the end of the visible earth? Verily, Rabbi, the prophet, when he thus declared the promise that the chosen people would inherit the earth, spake not of this world, but of the Kingdom of God that would be ours after the desolation, after the end. Wherefore, I read that Jerusalem shall be redeemed, that our people shall gain salvation, but in a new world, a new time. 'No sun shall shine upon them; for the Lord will give them light.' Surely these words tell of a Kingdom beyond the grave, of the Kingdom of our Heavenly Father? Truly it signifieth that they will have rule over a greater earth, a nobler world than ours, a kingdom invisible to our fleshy eyes, but visible to the eyes of the spirit. 'For they shall be in the presence of the light everlasting.' That being so, a Temple made with hands is but foolishness. Surely, when the people stand in the light of their Lord they will not need to raise to him any edifice save the edifice of truth and love. And verily, therefore, they will build it with their understanding and not with hands, with their spirit and not with the builders' tools, the moulders' knife, the thews and sinews of the man of earth."

The Pharisee shook his head sadly, saying: "Thine is a beautiful dream, boy. But I would gladly give all that I possess, if our people could rise up, cast the Roman from our land and set their feet upon the neck of their proud conquerors. I would go in peace if our people might thus inherit the earth. Truly, we know naught concerning what cometh after death; and thou mayest bid me have faith and assure me that the prophet spake of a marvellous Kingdom beyond the tomb, and verily, I rejoice if it be so. Howbeit, I would have Israel now as a conqueror, and not as Israel is, a withering blade of grass at the end of summer. For the Sadducees and men like our High priest seek through all seasons slowly and subtly to betray to the Romans our nation and our worship of the one God. And because they are the leaders, the people in time will follow them, and then shall Judaea be betrayed and our people's name perish out of the land. Yet I know that if they rise up now they will be put to the sword even as Juda and his followers were slain for their rebellion."

"Yea, Rabbi, he who taketh up the sword, shall perish by the sword."

"A shrewd saying; but from whence then can deliverance come in this present time?" Sichem gazed down at the youth and perceived compassion in his glance. The tenderness a father might shew to his son was displayed in that look of pity. And again the old man marvelled; for it seemed as if had changed the order of their being, as if he were the younger who sat at the feet of the elder and sought to draw wisdom and comfort from him.

And Jesus began to speak, once more breaking the quiet with that voice, the melody of which had first won the Pharisee in Nazareth. "Rabbi, art thou agreed with me when I say that I am not visible to thee, that thou canst not perceive me though I sit at thy feet

and thou dost touch my head and my hands with thy hand?"

"Nay, boy, this is foolishness. Thou art visible to me. I can perceive thee clearly even in this dim candle light."

"My face is but a mask, Rabbi. My hands and my head are coverings for me. I am surely neither this head, this body, nor these feet and hands. I am the understanding that causeth them to move here and to go there. I am the spirit that causeth my lips to open

and declare these words. But thine eyes cannot perceive that spirit; and thou canst only in small measure come to know its understanding through holding conversations with me. Verily, I am not my body; I am the ruler of my body. Dost thou not agree with me in this saying?"

'Yea, I am not as the Sadducees, I am a Pharisee. Wherefore, I am agreed with thee in this saying of thine. But how doth that in any manner aid me in my perplexity concerning my people, in my sorrow for their oppression, and in my fear for the destruction of the Temple and of our faith?"

"Thou fearest that they will lose the visible and outward signs. Thou fearest they will lose what doth of a surety pass away. The span of the life of man's body may be sixty years; but what is the span of the life of his soul? It may endure for everlasting. Truly, if we be the chosen people we are the children of God. So the span of the soul's endurance is not within our knowledge, but spreadeth throughout eternity. Of what account, therefore, are pride and power and earthly kingdoms? All shall speedily wax old and pass away. Seek not, therefore, triumph and treasure for our people upon earth. Let us seek for that treasure in Heaven, where there are neither thieves nor conquerors, where it need neither be bolted nor barred away, nor hid in a field or a cellar."

"Yea," sighed Sichem; "but before I pass hence I would see a deliverer of Israel reigning in Jerusalem, having lordship over the Gentiles. For only through our race can the kingdom of righteousness, the belief in the one God be established on earth. The prophets have declared it will come to pass. The prophets do not prophesy falsely."

"Yea, that is so, Rabbi; and it may come to pass in our generation. Who can read the signs of the times? My Father hath told me that the kingdom of righteousness is neither here nor there, but is within and not without the man. Or I would say that there can be no Kingdom of God set upon earth until first in every man there reigneth this kingdom of love and joy."

And now at last some understanding of the vision of Jesus came to the Pharisee. He laid his hand upon the boy's head, saying: "Verily, it is for me to call thee rabbi. From whence cometh this new wisdom? I know of no learned scribes or doctors in Galilee. It is but the home of husbandmen and fisher folk."

"All that I know hath been imparted to me by my Father. When I walk upon the hills in Galilee at dawn He communeth with me. He is the source of my life and my strength. Wherefore, I am what He hath made me."

"On the morrow thou shalt come with me to the Temple," said the old man. "I would have thee confound certain proud scribes with thy sayings even as thou hast confounded me on ~~this~~ eve." And this revered ancient, full of years, mighty in authority among his own ~~people~~ people, exulted because of the treasure he had found in this child's wisdom. And through the hours of the night and in the day that followed he rejoiced in Jesus as he might have rejoiced in his own son. Sonship had been, in past times, only a cause of grief to this proud man. For the children of his loins had followed Juda and had been slain in the season of his revolt against Roman rule.

CHAPTER XXXII

The lad of Nazareth spoke but little in the first hours passed by him in the Temple. But his questions were as two edged swords and smote the skilled battlers with words. At first they made merry when the boy overthrew argument, and with one saying, checked the abundant flowing speech of some hoary scribe. But, after a while, they began to question him, to inquire whether he held with this or that ruling, whether he could read another meaning into certain texts in the Scriptures. And so simple, yet so wise were the answers of Jesus the doctors about him murmured and marvelled and made no more a jest of his shrewd wit. Indeed, on the second day, when he came amongst them, one elder declared the mind of the gathering as he bade Jesus mount upon a block of stone and deliver a

discourse. "We cannot ensnare him if he asks questions, or if he answers us in a saying. So I would hear him speak at length. Then, may we truly judge of his wisdom."

The old men muttered, chuckled and laughed and were agreed, believing that this marvellous youth would display his ignorance in this fashion. For answer and question do not reveal the depths of a man's understanding. Only in a discourse doth he declare

the measure of his folly or of his learning. But Jesus shewed no signs of fear, and confounded them the more as he spoke of a man's understanding and character, shewing how lovely these might be when he was one of the children of God. Certain of his sayings were known to those who hearkened, for they had been shaped in other words by the rabbi Hillel. However, as speech came more easily Jesus dallied no longer with the wisdom of others and sought not to affirm or prove his own with it. He spake out boldly; and in answer to a question from the Pharisee turned to the old men about him, saying: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a treasure hid in a field, which, when a man hath found, he selleth all that he hath and buyeth that field. The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a grain of mustard which is the least of all seeds. But when it hath been sown it springeth up and becometh a great tree which giveth shade to the earth and shelter to the birds of the air." And Jesus declared the meaning of this saying, shewing how if the Kingdom of Heaven were thus sown in the heart of a good man it might so grow and flourish that many would find comfort and refuge in it. He shewed how a man, who was as this mustard tree, might be great and beyond all other men, though, peradventure, at the beginning, he sprang from lowly stock and was of the people. He uttered many other wise words, and the circle of scribes and doctors about him were as in a trance, silenced by a wisdom of which they scarce had understanding.

At last virtue seemed to go from the lad; he sank down wearied and spent. Then Mary, who watched from afar, said unto Joseph: "Go and speak unto Jesus. Declare thy kinship to these rabbis."

"Nay, I fear them. I am as they will perceive by my garments and by my speech, but a carpenter from Galilee." So he drew back, and Mary, because of her love for her son, pressed forward, passing between the clustering scribes who did not heed her, so eagerly were they debating the words of Jesus. And she caught at his robe, for he did not, on the instant, perceive her, and she cried: "Son, we have sought thee sorrowing these three days. Why didst thou deal so hardly [harshly?] with us?"

Turning himself about, Jesus gazed at her, and there was the look of a stranger in his glance; for his mind was away, bent upon the vision of the Great Rabbi.

"Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"

This saying caused Mary to hang her head and weep. For it was strange to her, and awe of these white beards overcame her understanding, overwhelming the courage of her love.

"Thou art the mother of Jesus, then?" said the Pharisee, and because of the kindness in his voice Mary was comforted.

"Oh, Rabbi," she entreated, "restore my son to me again. We have sought him in vain these three days and we believed that the hill robbers had taken him and would instruct him in their violent ways, making of him a thief and a slayer of men."

"He will one day be a great master in Israel, said the Pharisee. "He will bring to thee, his mother, both pride and glory, he will cause his father's name to be honoured by the elders." And then the Pharisee spoke with Jesus, asking him whether he would abide in his house or return to Galilee and be subject to his parents till he was a man.

"Rabbi," said the boy, "this is a hard matter. It is for thee to choose."

For a short space the Pharisee remained silent, and he broke it with slow speech: "If thou remainest with me and dost study wisdom in the Temple thine own wisdom will rouse jealousy and envy among the younger scribes. Also it were better thou shouldst return to those hills which have taught thee so much that I even bow to thy knowledge. Go, boy, be subject to thy parents till thou art grown, and gather, in that time, what further precious treasure of knowledge may be hid among the fields and groves of Nazareth or on the shores of that pleasant lake of Galilee. But when thou art a man return to Jerusalem and I shall welcome thee as my own son."

Then Mary led Joseph to the Pharisee, and the old man bade him and his wife to his house. He provided them with mules for their journey and bestowed rich gifts on them. Nay

more, he spoke such praises of Jesus that Joseph was humbled to the earth.

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CHAPTER XXXIII

No man can latch the door against the passing hours, nor stem the change and caprice of the wandering days. But like wanderers, seem these days in a prophet's life. They each have their own vision allotted out of the share of time that lies between birth and death.

When Jesus lived once more in his parents' house in Galilee he found favour with all the neighbours. Even strangers sought to make his acquaintance. For, as speedily as fire spreads in parched grass, did the tidings of the triumph of the carpenter's son spread throughout Nazareth. The Pharisee had presented Joseph with a store of money which was to provide for Jesus and give him leisure so that he might be free to gather wisdom and not be held by hard toil.

Now the tale of this bounty caused the lad to rise mightily in the esteem of those who had known him and scorned him in past days. They came to Jesus and claimed friendship with him. They even sought for his counsel and waited with eagerness upon his speech. Some of these neighbours were simple folk and did not reckon that they, in any way, seemed hypocritical in thus changing so swiftly, in hailing nobility, where they had in a past season only perceived folly. They were prepared to accept authority in all matters. The Scribe of Nazareth had declared Jesus to be a fool and an ignorant loon. Therefore, he was so. The Pharisee declared the son of the carpenter to be a wise youth who would some day be a master in Israel. He had dowered this lad with no mean sum of money; so there could be no further doubt in the minds of the people of Nazareth. Jesus was of great account, a matter of pride and of vaunting for those who now hastened to claim friendship or a knowledge of him.

The schoolmaster went into the carpenter's shop some seven days after his return from Jerusalem, and the twisted pedagogue said: "Joseph, I am indeed rejoiced to learn of the honour bestowed upon thy son. Now I am not one to boast or to be puffed up and proud; but he oweth all his knowledge to me. Did I not instruct him since first he was able to walk to my school? The wise sayings, that caused the learned doctors in the Temple to hearken to him, were set in his mouth by me. I have never stinted, never guarded the learning that is mine. I gave of it freely to Jesus; and being a lad of quick wit, he gathered it up and gave it forth to these scribes. I do not ask for thy thanks, Joseph. For I rejoice that I have thus been able to win honour for thy son."

"Nay, I am mightily beholden to thee," said the simple carpenter. "I would that I could, in any measure, shew my thankfulness to thee."

"I desire no reward. I have ever been lowly of spirit."

"But tell me," said Joseph, somewhat perplexed, "who is this father of whom Jesus spake when he was in Jerusalem, a father who bestoweth upon him his most pithy sayings, his wisest answers. I know I am not the one signified by this title."

"Verily, Joseph, thou art somewhat slow of wit," said the schoolmaster. I am that father. Be not troubled because Jesus haileth me with this name. For I am as his father in knowledge. In all else thou art his father."

Now Joseph was much uplifted, and he told his wife to lay all the best that was in the house before the schoolmaster. The ancient hypocrite drank and was merry in the company of his host; and when Jesus entered the room he cried: "Come here, boy," and saluted him with a kiss, and praised him for his industry as a student, calling him the lad with the quickest wit in Galilee.

In silence Jesus gazed at the schoolmaster, then turned and went to the door. Whereupon, Mary called to him, saying:

"Tell me, dear son, who is this father of whom thou didst speak to the Rabbi in Jerusalem? Assuredly thy father here is not that one."

"Nay, I spake of another."

"Behold that other," said Joseph, laughing. "Verily, we know thy secret now. It is our good and esteemed friend, the schoolmaster." And Joseph pointed with his finger at the pedagogue, who smiled graciously.

Sudden anger lit up the countenance of Jesus. He turned swiftly and furiously upon the man. "Dost thou claim that thou art that Father whom I named to the Rabbi in Jerusalem?"

"Yea, assuredly. Why such heat, boy? I am glad that in Jerusalem thou didst remember that the wise sayings thou didst utter were mine and so informed the scribes when thou

wert holding conversation with them."

"The hypocrite shall be known by his much speaking. But if all his words are gathered together it will be perceived that they tell out no wisdom." Thus Jesus muttered, as if he addressed another within himself. Then he cried with swift and sudden wrath: "Thou art not that Father of whom I spake. Verily, thou dost soil His name by uttering it with those loose lips of thine." And now the anger changed to mockery in the voice of Jesus as he continued. "In past seasons thou didst call me a fool, and now thou dost claim to be the father of this declared folly of mine. Yea truly, thou shouldst bang thy head in shame if thou be what thou claimest-my father in knowledge. For then thou art answerable for all the foolishness that thou didst, in the old days, declare proved me to be the lad the dullest of wit in all the coasts of Galilee."

Now Joseph and Mary were so astonished they failed to admonish or check their son's speech. They did but gape and timorously watch the pedagogue until these last words were uttered. Then Joseph rose up, saying: "Jesus, thou art beside thyself; thou shalt on the instant declare thy sorrow for the naughty sayings thou hast uttered. Hast thou no respect for grey hairs?"

"I have no respect for them when they shelter hypocrisy," the boy answered. "We should not respect a man because he is old, neither should we respect him for his youth. We should revere and respect those who are simple and true of heart, who twist not their speech according to the name or estate of the man. I sorrow, mother, if I have dealt thee any hurt by speaking in heat and wrath. But I am glad that I have thus spoken to the schoolmaster. To every man shall it be according to his deserts."

With these words Jesus turned upon his heel and hastened from the house. Swift as the flight of a fawn was his departure and Joseph failed to hinder his going, and afterwards, called his name in vain.

CHAPTER XXXIV

The eye of day closed. The hush before moonrise settled upon the lake. Little James and his mother went hand in hand along a narrow way and halted near a thicket, whispering together. Then James whistled thrice like a blackbird. The sweetness of his fluty call had scarcely passed when there came a noise of breaking branches and Jesus leaped from the embracing arms of an ancient tree, lighting upon the earth near Mary Clopas.

She cried out softly, startled by this break in the quiet that was all about them. Then she addressed Jesus, saying: "Thou must forgive James, because perceiving the fret that was on me, he betrayed thy place of hiding."

"There is naught to forgive; but what dost thou desire of me?

Fearing the wildness of the fawn, Mary hastily answered: "That thou wilt hearken to me. For, as thou knowest, I have understanding of thee."

"Yea, I will hearken."

"Thy mother told me that at noon the schoolmaster was eating in her house and praising thee. Thou didst enter it, and Joseph says that thou didst speak impudently to this man. He declares, that as soon as thou art discovered, thou shalt go and humble thyself before thine instructor, confess that thou didst fling at him hasty, untrue sayings and that he is truly thy father in knowledge."

"I have learned the meaning of pain from the schoolmaster," said Jesus; "but he hath imparted neither knowledge nor wisdom to me. Wherefore, I would be a liar if I hailed him with such a title. Father in knowledge!" continued the lad. "Nay, I might call him father in hypocrisy if he desireth a name."

"Verily, thy tongue is as bitter as the sea," answered Mary.

"Yea, but there is oft times healing in bitter waters."

"However that may be, when thou goest home this night Joseph will set upon thee and thou wilt be compelled to humble thyself before the schoolmaster."

"I may not be false to mine own integrity."

"But, boy, thou wilt hurt thy mother if thou dost disobey thy father."

"I would gladly spare my mother if it were possible. Know that if I yield in this case I shall yield in others," the lad cried hotly. "I shall be false to that light I hail as the truth, light that should never go out, that should be as the ever burning lamps, light that lives within each one of us."

"Thou shouldst honour thy father. Surely that is the way to truth, and it is the commandment of God."

Jesus fell into a silence, and in his trouble, walked to and fro, his sanded feet making soft noise as they broke up the little carpet of twigs and thickly growing plants. "Truth?" he muttered at last. "If I now yield to my father I shall be false to it; and that one surrender leading to others, will destroy my joy, my peace."

"What is thy peace?"

"That I do the will of my Heavenly Father."

"Jesus," said Mary, "thou mayest open thy heart to me concerning Him. But I entreat thee not to declare His Name to any other. For soon thou wilt be accused of blasphemy. The people in Nazareth are already set against thee because thou art not like other boys. The honour bestowed on thee by the Rabbi in Jerusalem hath caused them to forget the old offence. But if thou, who art only a lad, continue to speak of thy Heavenly Father in a manner that seems strange and even wicked to them, they will rise up one day against thee and will bring shame upon thy parents by casting thee forth from the town."

"Yea," said Jesus; "that is good counsel. My time for speaking of what I know to be true is not yet come. Howsoever, I cannot surrender to my father in this matter. I shall not return to the school, and I will not utter falsehoods by declaring my sorrow to the schoolmaster and by nourishing his vanity with praise of wise words he never imparted to me."

"I grieve then," said Mary Clopas. "For Joseph will punish thee, and thy mother will suffer more than she is, in this time able to bear."

"Then the doors of the house are closed to me. I must abide in the woods."

"Come to us," said Mary; I would gladly shelter thee."

"My father will be angered. Nay, I would not make a division." Jesus smiled upon Mary, and the bitterness passed from his countenance.

"Yea, that is true. Clopas would not be easy if we would seem to set thee up against Joseph," sighed Mary. "Only tell me where thou wilt pass the night."

"The foxes have their holes," said Jesus, "the birds their nests. I know not where I may rest."

"Then it were better to return to thy father's house!"

"Nay, that cannot be. I will make me a shelter with leaves and grasses in the wild places on the hill. Fear not. All will be well for me."

"But wild beasts stray at times as far even as the hills, seeking in their hunger what they may devour."

"I am quick and wary," said Jesus. "I hear what thou canst not hear, so oft have I walked abroad upon the hills. I know each sound. I can tell what bird sitteth; what small, furry beast breaketh cover. I know the language of the winged insects, even the creep of the snake through the grass doth not escape me. Be without fear; the wild creatures are my friends, only among men are my enemies."

Mary spoke at length with the boy, causing him to promise to meet her at each day's end. Then she gave him bread and meat to eat, and together these three were glad, forgetting the cause of their meeting in this solitary place. When the mind of Jesus was not troubled by remembrance of the strangeness between him and Joseph, he was, in that season of

youth, joyful and merry of heart, delighting in gay speech, in jest and in song.

And now, after the three had eaten, he whistled and sang, giving forth the music of the woods, shaping the noises of the beasts in the early day, then rendering the songs of the birds, so that they were a sweet melody in the hearing of Mary and little James.

It was hard to part from this boy who was dearer to her than her own children. But at last she rose up and followed the path lighted by the moon which led her once more to the shore of the lake. Then Jesus bade her farewell and passed swiftly from her sight, vanishing into a cluster of bushes.

Mary had not his swift perception. Clopas came round the bend of the path a little later, seeking them as they faced towards Nazareth. He chid his wife for her absence from home, and she did not defend herself; for she would not in that hour disclose the secret of the wild fawn hid in the woods.

Later she learned that Mary watched for her son with a troubled mind. So she assured her that he was well, but would not, for a while, return to his home. And these two women held

their peace, fearing to utter any word concerning Jesus before the brooding Joseph.

¶

CHAPTER XXXV

For the first time in his life Jesus was to sleep beneath the stars, to know neither the shelter of roof nor barn. For the first time he was wholly alone in the glimmering dark, and he was not afraid.

Fireflies leaped and danced in the soft night air above him. Bats fluttered to and fro, with hiss and whine, passing from thicket to thicket. Now and then there came a crackle of branches as some furred creature was stirred out of sleep by the wanderer. But for the most part the breathless calm of that night of early summer held earth, water, stars and all living things within its embrace.

Hastily Jesus climbed a steep path that wound in and out among fields and olive groves, and led him at last away from the lands of the husbandmen into the wild places. He entered a sombre wood of ancient oaks; and suddenly he was afraid. For there came to his hearing the long, low howl of a jackal, and it was followed by the beating of wings, certain bird cries; and then all went dark as a cloud ensheathed the warm splendour of the risen moon.

In that night the sternness melted from the heart of Jesus. The wise being, who seemed so old in knowledge and reigned within him, withdrew, passed from the young body, and Jesus was once again but a little lad of tender years, who ran sobbing and stumbling into the impenetrable obscurity of that ancient grove. At last so spent was he through breathlessness and fear, he fell upon his face in the bushes and lay there cowering, drawing their leafy branches down about him.

And again the jackals howled, but this time no birds stirred, neither did any living thing answer that hungry cry; and Jesus murmured in his despair: "Father, who art in Heaven, deliver me from evil, preserve me in this dread night."

And in a little while, as the boy watched and trembled, there came the answer of welcoming light. Once more the eldest of the stars spread its rays about the earth; the veils of mist withdrew; and all the little candles of the heads penetrated the dewy dark, illuminating the fields and wilderness with their glow worm sparks, with the glimmer of their mantle of gold.

Jesus rose up, brushing the sweat from his brow and sighing his thankfulness. The flesh no longer trembled and cowered away, the wise elder being had returned to its habitation. Taking up his stick once more he sought the path and did not halt until he came to a glade wherein grew a giant tree. The lad caught at a branch and climbed into the centre of the trunk. Finding a nest between its great limbs, he clambered forth upon the branches, plucking leaves, and then bearing them back to the heart of this ancient tree.

So wide was the bole it held him as he lay within it, and thus he might rest, fearing neither wolf nor jackal, neither the adder nor the venomous snake. Sleep scaled up his eyes.

The chatter of the dawn called back the soul to the slumbering body, and slowly Jesus roused up and stared about him, wondering at the leafy chamber, at the sheltering branches.

The fears of the wild beasts and of the demons departed in that rosy light of early day. All the world seemed a paradise, Its gaiety such the lad joined in the song of the birds, and

then lay back, for a while dreaming and wondering whether life in such solitude were not better than any other life on earth.

At a later time he spoke to little James of all his thoughts and fancies in this season. It seemed as if he had found his true home in this oak wood, and the desire was his for the solitude which yields the sense in such fullness of the presence of the Father.

However, when the sun was master of the high heavens, Jesus descended the hill, neither stopping nor staying until his feet trod the shores of the lake once again. He was a strong swimmer at all times, and now delighted in that strength, playing in the silvery shallows, or plunging into the deep, dim pools. Weariness at length drew the lad to the shore, where he lay among myrtles and thyme, watching the clouds of whirring insects and great drifting birds.

And a voice called from among the reeds. "Verily, Jesus, thou art a fish, not a lad. Rare was thy sport as I watched thee from the path. Truly, thou wilt grow fins, so joyful is thy battle with the waters."

Starting up, the boy perceived Heli, the beggar, who joined him straightaway in his shelter of myrtles beneath the palms. And together these two, the desert wanderer and his young disciple, rested in the gathering heat and spoke of all that had befallen them since their last leave taking. And having set in order the whole chronicle in his mind, Heli mused a while, and then declared his counsel. "Abide in the woods for a season with me, and I will instruct thee in the lore of herb healing and healing through the virtues of the body and the understanding. Verily, we shall not hunger in these weeks of early summer if we abide here; and thou wilt acquire a wisdom that may set thee above thy brethren and will always be of service to thee."

Jesus rejoiced at the promise of this scarred old man and agreed to obey his commands and diligently study herbs under his guidance.

CHAPTER XXXVI

In the soft smiling land of Galilee few were rich and many were poor. But the people lived in the joy of the hour and did not heed the shadow of the morrow. Even though they might go hungry in certain seasons the sun graced so many of their days they remained glad. Even though the taxes of the Romans weighed heavily on the poor fisher folk they would find pleasure and delight in their shining lake, in the wondrous dream of trees, fields and flowers that made of its shores a paradise. They did not know the root of their contentment, they were like the nightingales in the woods at moonrise, held life as a sweet song, and lived in its melody even from sunrise to sunset.

Now Joseph was not of the temper of the Galilean folk. Cares easily invaded his understanding, and wrinkled his brows. He could not live only in the passing hours. Dark imaginations would, at times, distress his whole being. However, he was of good heart since his return from Jerusalem, and despite his resolve that Jesus should humble himself before the schoolmaster, he laughed and jested, making merry because of the prosperous days.

It is true that, at first, he had been angered at the flight of Jesus. But he soon came to believe that a night or two of hardship, passed beneath the open sky in the loneliness of the heights, would cure his son and lead him to perceive the folly of such truancy. Peace reigned in the household. His business prospered as the tale of the prowess of Jesus at Jerusalem was noised abroad and many demanded the labour of Joseph and his son Thomas. Indeed, so great became the press of his business he must needs instruct James and make a messenger of Seth, his brother, who was still a little lad. And the folk, who came asking for Joseph's service, praised him mightily, declaring that such a noble son as Jesus could only spring from a noble and gifted father. Therefore, this simple carpenter was much uplifted, and his mind softened when he thought of Jesus. But, despite Mary's prayers and entreaties he would not be turned from his purpose.

"When thy prodigal first born cometh home he shall not enter the house till he hath humbled himself before the schoolmaster." These words were uttered again and again.

Mary was ailing and near her time; and they drew tears from her eyes. She answered: "Then Jesus will never enter his home again."

"It will not be the fault of his father if he doth not return. The sons of the common people receive no schooling. We have stinted ourselves so that our three sons, Jesus, Thomas and James, should receive instruction in their letters. We have toiled early and late so that they might have the chances that are only the portion of our betters and of merchant sons."

"Yea, and rich hath been our reward," cried Mary. "The wisdom shewn by Jesus when in the Temple hath caused thy name to be the talk of Nazareth. Is that not enough? Surely if our son be so wise we should no more command him, but should hearken to his speech, and not seek to compel him in any manner."

Darkness overspread the countenance of Joseph, and rough would have been his answer if Leah, his daughter, had not come running to him bearing clusters of many-coloured flowers. These she thrust into his great hands, uttering childish prattle concerning them and their gathering, and she besought him to lift her up so that he might bear her on his shoulder down the road.

This little maid was fair and all her brethren were dark. Joseph loved her exceedingly and called her "his golden treasure." Now his eyes lighted up, and snatching the child from the earth, he embraced her, his voice softening as it sounded names of love and delight in her ear. At her bidding, he bore her from his workshop, and went to and fro in the sunshine without. They played together, splashing the waters of a little brook, soiling their raiment; and so great was their delight the hardness melted in the soul of the carpenter, and he was a gentle father swayed by his daughter's will, obedient to her fancies. Mary too was glad. In all that concerned his children, Joseph was a good father, kind and loving, having understanding of their needs. But this, his little daughter who had followed the elder lads, was as the apple of his eye. He could not deny her any desire. Her golden head was to him an ever increasing wonder; her quick prattle a joy of which he could never weary. So, in those hours when trade prospered and Leah was near him, the cup of his pleasure was full, and he said to Mary: "God hath blessed us abundantly. Truly, I would that we might live for ever if it could be in this fashion; if my children might not grow old, or the tools of my trade he idle, if thou shouldst be beside me with little Leah as in the present time, playing, singing, changing not one whit from day to day."

And Mary made merry answer: "Thou wilt be sour of face and a jealous father when thou dost encounter the young man who will seek Leah, this golden headed love of thine, in ~~marriage~~. Verily, thou wilt be distraught in that season."

Mary said no more; for Joseph silenced her by setting his lips upon her lips, and in this manner declaring again the love of his youth for the maid who had walked the hills alone.

CHAPTER XXXVII

Evening had come. The golden shuttle of the sun loosed its threads, weaving a coat of many colours, casting it over the hills and waters of Galilee. Heli and Jesus stood among the rocky ways, gazing towards Carmel, and then towards Adria. And a little piece of this great sea was perceived by them and caused the lad to question the elder concerning his life in those Gentile lands bordering it.

Heli answered: "Mine is a sorry tale, I have sinned and suffered, and yet through all my days, I have sought truth among men. It is rarer than diamonds and opals, and it may not be discovered among the scribes and Pharisees, but in the desert places where the unlearned abide. When I was a lad I determined that I would learn all the ways of men; so I visited the cities, laboured as a mason in Tiberias, in Caesarea Philippi, heaving great stones, working with my trowel, laying the foundations of heathen temples. I was a sailor and visited Antioch, Athens, Alexandria and Ephesus. in each of these towns I dwelled for a season; yet they gave me neither happiness nor peace. And behold, I encountered a man of the east who bade me journey to his land and told me that in it I

might find wisdom. So I became a fighter, a man of war, and was hired by the rich merchants. These possessed caravans, containing myrrh, frankincense and costly merchandise, that traverse the desert of Arabia; and I was one of the guards of such treasures. I visited the mighty cities of the Indies and came to know the eastern world. But for me there was neither joy nor peace in these thronged places. I laboured all my youth for other men and was bereaved of good. Truly, it seemed as if God could not dwell in great cities. For beside the towered palaces, the glimmering temples, the pomp of kings

and rulers, were ever the narrow, filthy lanes, where lived hungry, broken men and women.

"In these crooked streets eyeless beggars wandered to and fro, lamenting and shaking their rags. Slaves, crippled by their masters and cast out in their age, lay in sickness in the foul dens that were but a stone's throw from the rich perfumed dwellings of their lords. Sickness, misery, despair and leprosy were monarchs in one quarter of each great city. And the sins committed in these towns were small and mean. Despite the fairness, the wonder of Antioch, Jerusalem, Caesarea, Athens, Ephesus, Alexandria, I could not close my eyes to the oppression and to the tears of the poor and the slaves who dwelt within their walls and were in number as the sands of the sea. Verily, boy, the cities are as nests of vipers and toads. There is little pity and scarce any hope in them. They be builded for the joy of a few and for the despair of many.

"All seemed vanity to me until I sought the wilderness and discovered the wandering tribes who make their home beside the rare springs in the hot sands. Strong and fierce are the men of the wilderness. At times they slay one another. They rob travelers, they pollute their bodies when the wildness of the desert invadeth their understanding. They resemble the hyenas, who lurk among the sand drifts and in the shelter of the stony precipices; yet I found among them a nobility that is not to be discovered in the towns. I met with kindness and the princely gift. For verily, when a thirsty man bestoweth upon thee all that is in his water bottle he is truly a brother and greater than any prince or king. Times I have fainted while journeying in the barren ways of Arabia and I have been succoured, delivered from the death of thirst by the desert rovers. Wherefore faith came again to me. More and more I sought the company of such outcasts, and they imparted their secrets to me, leading me to their chief and his counsellors. And these fierce men had a knowledge, a wisdom I have not discovered in any city. So I laboured no more as a mason, shipman or soldier, I sought but the hardships and the life of these outcasts. Great was my reward."

And ' Jesus inquired: "What was the treasure thou didst find among them?"

Heli answered: "The ways of Jehovah are dark, they make me afraid; such is my vision when I shake the dust of cities from off my feet. The ways of Jehovah are light, they make me glad when I have dwelled for a season among the outcasts in the desert places."

"Then lead me to them," the lad entreated.

"Nay, not now. First thou shalt be reconciled to thy father and mother. Thou art still too tender of body. Thou wouldst be overcome by the burning sun, by the hunger and the hard ways of life. In three years' time, maybe, I shall lead thee to them; and I prophesy thou wilt learn more from this ancient desert people than from all the parchments and the scribes in Jerusalem. If thou wouldst know truth thou must seek it amongst all kinds of men. But the sayings of the learned doctors in the Temple are as the heavy wines of Asia, they cloud the understanding and cause it to dwell ever in mists of words."

And Jesus answered: "I will hold thee to thy promise, Heli."

"Yea, I will keep it. For I have learned only from these outcasts how to keep faith. They may be fierce and cruel, but they are not hypocrites as the men in the towns. Their word is their bond, is as sure as the undying rocks in these mountains."

The two now fell into a silence as they watched the passing of day, gazing upon the golden image of Carmel set among pale far off clouds-wondrous in its stillness, in that slowly perishing glow.

Afterwards they descended into the woods, made them a fire and broiled fish for their supper, drinking with it the water from a stream. And when the moon had risen they distilled the juice of herbs by setting them in a pot among the red embers.

Heli instructed Jesus as to the two ways of healing, through the strength of herbs cunningly blended and through the virtue that may be given forth from the healer's body if he so work upon it with his understanding. And in those days of summer Jesus first came to know the power that resided within his body and learned how it might serve him,

how he might give of it to the sufferer; and when he had been emptied might replenish it again.

Heli perceived that this lad was not as other youths, that so strong was his spirit, so pure his body, he was as some storehouse of healing, he was rich in all that pertained to the life-giving strength that should be required of the physician.

" When thou art grown thou wilt be a wonder worker," cried Heli. "But know that thy power

cannot enter another man's body and cure the ailing part unless he openeth the door to thee, unless he hath faith. Wherefore, thou shalt learn how to rouse such faith, how to compel it with the glance of thine eye."

And the beggar set Jesus certain practices which he performed at sunrise when the new born light flowing from the east nourishes the invisible body of man which contains the power. In such labours and in hearkening to the wise sayings of Heli, Jesus knew peace and the sweetness of that triumph which cometh from mastery and the high wisdom that is not of this earth.

Thrice a week he descended the hillside, making towards Nazareth at sunset. And he encountered Mary Clopas and little James and learned their tidings, receiving also their gifts of food.

There came a week when James bore the sorrowful tale of sickness to him. Numbers were stricken with fever in Nazareth. The younger children of Mary Clopas were plagued by its heats, and Leah, the beloved of Joseph, was so sorely smitten that the women and the physician declared that she was like to die.

Jesus was much cast down, and returned in haste to his wise counsellor and entreated him to visit his sister in Nazareth, bearing with him the juices of the healing herb.

"They cast stones at me and called me a desert dog when I was last in Nazareth," said Heli. "Why should I suffer my understanding to be soiled by their hate and their ignorance again? Why should I let my peace be stolen from me by those who despise my wisdom, calling it blasphemy? Nay, I cannot visit that little town, which in some ways, is as the image of the great towns I have long foresworn. But I will gaze upon Leah while we rest by this brook."

"How canst thou perceive a child who lieth a league or more from this place and is hid within four walls?"

"Be silent and she will appear in the mirror of the water."

Heli gazed down into a still pool shaped by the rock within the flowing stream. It was a quiet hour, a time when day folds its wings like a mother bird over the young within the nest. The light was almost gone when at last Heli lifted his head, saying: "Leah will not be healed by these foolish folk. They crowd about her and the fever is at its height. Still her strength is not wholly gone from her. I perceive that she may live for yet another three days and not yield to the Dark Angel till the week hath ended and the Sabbath is come."

On hearing these words, Jesus again besought Heli to go with him to Nazareth, and again the beggar refused to yield to his prayer. "I will fill thee with the healing grace and once thou art charged as a pitcher with water, I will send thee to Nazareth, and peradventure, thou mayest be in time to save thy sister's life, or at least, to make easy for her the thorny road of death."

Jesus must content himself with this assurance. And he laboured diligently night and day in order that he might have such strength he would overcome the evil that was slowly causing the body of the girl to waste and perish. There came an hour when Heli bade him rest and seek refreshment, letting his mind float from him like a drifting swallow.

And the pupil was obedient to the master. Then was the pool in the brook searched once more.

"I see that the fever presseth her hard. I see that thy mother is not in the room with her, for she is delivered of a babe. The foolish people gathering about Leah's bed, and there is but empty sound. They bray like wild asses and harm the maid. Thy father is beside himself and confusion prevaleth within thy home."

"I shall go on the instant to Nazareth," cried Jesus.

"Nay, the time is not yet come."

"Leah may die in this coming night, and how then shall I ever forgive myself for having

tarried away in the hills?"

"Leah, whom we love, will pass hence." The lad wrung his hands, his head cast down, his limbs trembling in the presence of this first deep Sorrow.

"Obey me, and she may live. Disobey me and she is lost to thee." Heli spoke sternly and Jesus said no more, following the elder as he wandered down from the hills, not halting

until they were upon the shore.

It was the custom of Heli to remain silent sometimes for two hours or more. And there were occasions when he would not even bid good night to Jesus. However, great was the understanding between these two, speech was not needful; communion might even come without words. But on this evening the mind of the master was closed to this pupil, no unvoiced saying or bidding came from it.

The two gathered the dry leaves in a little heap. Then at last, Heli spoke one word: "Sleep."

Jesus lay in a covert of reeds and fern; the willows of the lake encompassed him, shutting out the starlight: deep slumber sealed up his eyelids.

When Jesus rose up from the bed of reeds and leaves the summer dawn was breaking soft as the bloom upon apple blossom; and he had found peace in his deep slumbers.

Gazing upon him, Heli knew that his hour had come, and he said: "Go now to Nazareth. Turn neither to the right nor to the left, but travel swiftly to thy father's house. Thou mayest smite the evil. Thou art in the measure of the melody that floweth from the Great Power. One counsel I give thee. Be not afraid. Fear is nothing but the betrayal of the succour offered by the Spirit. Be not roused to wrath, be not stirred by grief. Let not any wind of passion penetrate thine understanding. For the shaken mind and body cannot serve the Great Power."

Jesus bowed his head, shewing that he had given heed to this counsel. Then, an instant after its utterance, he vanished.

And the strange wanderer, who had given him of his wisdom, sighed and murmured: "If he but knew. Already be is master, already the Spirit gathereth about him with a power that never gathered about me despite my years of fasting and of labour. Pure as no other is pure. Innocent as no other is innocent. Will he ever remain thus unspotted by the world?"

CHAPTER XXXVIII

Women crowded the sick room in Joseph's house. They came with counsel and with comforting words, or they bore certain cures that were known throughout the countryside. But these did not in any way avail. The fever wholly possessed Leah, and as the hours passed strange cries came from her lips and her brow was burning.

Joseph sat beside her, his head bowed, his eyes dark with pain. He could scarcely bear to look upon his beloved. Hope had fled. It seemed to his distraught understanding as if already the apparitions of the grave were assembled about him.

Soon the moaning ceased, the eyes closed, the child lay still.

"She is passing hence," cried the women.

"Let us pray," murmured Clopas, and he knelt down while the sobbing of Joseph alone broke the silence that gathered in that chamber.

Mary lay in a small inner room. The cry of the people gave her strength to rise; and so she was the first to perceive Jesus as he paused upon the threshold of the house which had been his home. Her eyes spoke of their welcome and their despair to him as he passed between the kneeling women, and, laying his hand softly upon her arm, bade her rest and be comforted; for all was well.

No one stayed him, the people being stifled by the fear of the Dark Angel which comes in some season to every home. He stood beside Leah, took her hand in his, speaking sharply, smiting the stillness as a man may smite a tree with his axe.

"Wake, Leah. Arise."

Then the eyes of the maid opened; she sat up straightly, gazed at her mother and father and shook back her long hair.

Jesus spoke once more. "Lie back, Leah. Be healed."

Again the maid obeyed him, and now peace was written upon her countenance, and

colour came to her cheeks, while her brother stood there, his gaze fixed upon her, his lips moving, great drops of sweat standing out upon his brow.

And no man or woman dared utter any word, and no man or woman knew what time passed as Jesus wrestled with the Dark Angel. Only at last were they aware that he bent down and wiped his sister's face and cheeks, settling her limbs, laying them at ease and murmuring: "Now she will rest, for she is whole."

Stumbling, he groped for a way to the open, and, when dumb amazement no more stilled the watching people and they sought the boy, they found him bent like a hoop, lying upon the dust of the ground, so spent in body he could not utter any word.

Little Leah slept within. When Joseph stroked her brow he perceived that it was cool, when he laid his ear close to her mouth he perceived she breathed like one who is whole.

"Jesus has given us back Leah," he declared to Mary.

"Then rise up and seek thy son and give him welcome."

ea, more than welcome. I shall seek his forgiveness."

CHAPTER XXXIX

James, Mary's third son, was a seemly lad in the eyes of the people, for he obeyed his elders blindly, unquestioningly; and even when of tender years, would fast and deny himself. He was held to be an example to all lads of his age by the schoolmaster and those others who knew him.

Diligently this thin faced, thin lipped lad hearkened to the teacher. Swiftly he learned by heart the letters and passages in the Scriptures. Only it was hard for him if he were shewn letters not encountered by him before. His knowledge was gained by rote and not by understanding.

On the morrow of the healing the ordering of the household was changed. Jesus had ever been last in the favour of Joseph, now he was first, his place at the board laid at his father's right hand. Kind words and pleasant sayings flowed from the lips of the neighbours and those who had scorned the boy. He was acclaimed and his counsel sought; and Joseph told his children to heed Jesus and be subject to him. It was for a time as if another head had been set over the household. Yet Jesus did not desire to be master, and the more his kin sought to extol him the more he withdrew into himself, smiling gently upon them, refusing to give commands or to accept service from his own generation.

And James accosted his eldest brother, saying: "Thou wast scorned, and now by reason of this marvel wrought by thee, thou art raised up as chief among us; and even our elders hearken to thy speech. Tell me from whom didst thou learn the healing art? From whom didst thou learn also to read the Scriptures in the Hebrew? I know them only by rote. I cannot read chance passages here and there in the Holy Books."

"True," said Jesus, "The schoolmaster doth not instruct ye in the meaning and significance of each letter. Ye can but gather the Scriptures into your remembrance by uttering aloud with him certain passages. In past seasons I perceived, therefore, that it was vain to study and endeavour to learn to interpret the Scriptures in this fashion. So I heeded him not when we were in the schoolhouse, I had no patience with such folly, and he was angered and called me a dullard. But I discovered in Heli, the beggar, a master in wisdom. He taught me to read the Hebrew letters, and through his aid was I able to expound the Scriptures in the presence of the wise Pharisee who came from Jerusalem. It is to Heli also I owe that knowledge of healing which caused me to cure Leah when she was like to die."

Now James was greatly cast down, and he said: "I yearn to acquire thy power of healing,

but I would not consort with Heli, the beggar, or would I, even for the delight of unraveling the text of all the Holy Books, be seen in his company. For he is a sinner and hath lived evilly."

"Many good men have been accused of sin," said Jesus. "Name Heli's accusers and declare their testimony."

"The Scribe of Nazareth says that the Tribe of Wanderers, to which he belongs, is evil in its works, inasmuch as such wandering people did not worship the Lord, observing all the rites of Moses. Heli was bidden sit down at meat in the house of a fisherman, and his hands were not washed, nor did he pray or cleanse himself as is laid down in the Law. Further, he spake with heat concerning the people in high places in Jerusalem, men of the Sanhedrin whom we should revere. Also Miriam hath sworn that his eye is evil, and that through gazing upon her son, he caused a devil to enter into the boy. Thou knowest he hath been a lunatic in this last season. While ye were in Jerusalem the people rose up and stoned Heli, driving him from Nazareth because of Miriam's accusation."

"It is well known that there is venom on her tongue. Believe not her empty, fearful sayings."

"But the Scribe of Nazareth agreed with her and declared that Heli had intercourse with demons. So was the Scribe the first to cast a stone."

"They stoned the prophets," murmured Jesus.

So,' continued James; "though I yearn for knowledge of healing and for understanding of Holy Writ I would not gain it by encountering Heli."

"Nay, but it is a rare chance. Verily Heli is one in a generation," cried Jesus. "I go now to greet him where the waters meet. Come with me, and I will pray him to impart a wisdom to thee that will some day give to thee thy dream."

"My dream?" inquired James.

"Yea, thou desirest to be a prophet-even as Ezekiel or Isaiah."

"That is true, but if I could only gain their wisdom through the counsel of this outcast I would liefer lose such a prize. Howbeit, I know that because he is evil I can gain no good thing from him."

"Only the people and this Scribe declare that Heli is an evil man." And again he murmured: "They stoned the Prophets."

Not heeding these last words, James opened his heart to his brother and besought him to impart wisdom, and thus, so to raise him up he might be an example to all.

Jesus looked sadly at the lad, and after a silence, sorrowfully answered: "Nay, how can I share my precious wisdom with thee? Thou couldst not receive it, for thy heart is closed to wisdom. Thou dost follow the world and heed only the sayings of those who be accounted wise and are not wise. Verily, James, I cannot instruct thee until thou dost cast from thee the chains which others set about thine understanding, until truly thou art single of heart."

"I dare not. Heli is evil. Our elders declare it. Know that the desert rovers are a licentious people." James hung down his head and, sighing, went sorrowfully away.

When Jesus encountered Heli he bore his pack upon his back, and the staff of the wanderer was in his band: "Thou seekest the road again?" inquired the lad.

"Yea, I may not tarry longer here. My tribe hath need of me. In the parched days of summer I can find them water where there would seem to be naught but drought and hot sand. I can cure the fever of this burning season. I can even discover herbs that are not withered and may feed them in the stony uplands wherein no green thing abides after the spring is gone."

And Jesus besought his friend to return speedily again, and he told him of the healing of Leah, and declared his need of further counsel.

"I shall come back in three years' time," said Heli. "Remain subject to Joseph during those twelve seasons. And when the neighbours bear their sick to thee refuse to serve thyself of the healing power. Do not even use the knowledge of herbs which I have imparted to thee."

Jesus asked the beggar why he should thus hide his talent and turn his back upon the

ailing the sorrowful.

"In a later time, when thou art grown, thou wilt cure many who are grievously sick. Thou wilt raise up the maimed, the halt, and wilt recover the sight of the blind. But if thou seekest now to serve thyself of the healing grace thou wilt fail. For thy neighbours know thee since thou wert a baby. Wherefore, they will be without faith; and the virtue thou canst give to them through the power of the Spirit can only be received by believers. Also,

though thou art praised by all men in this season, there are still folk in Nazareth who hate thee with all their being. For they are jealous, and they would work against the healing power with this venom of jealousy. For all these reasons thou wouldest fail in tending those who are sick among thy neighbours and thy kin. . . . Continue to seek thy Heavenly Father upon the hills at certain times, and observe also, in solitude, those practices which will so shape thine understanding and body. When I return again thou wilt be as a vessel which can receive and give forth freely the healing power. Fare thee well, brother, the road calleth me."



CHAPTER XL

Fever smote numbers of the people in that warm season of summer. Nazareth became a sorrowful city in which the mourners increased daily. And the weeping and wailing of women were no more of rare occasion but darkened the brightness of each noon as they cried for the pride of life, for the young as well as old who must be home to their long home.

Certain men spoke of the cure wrought by Jesus, declaring it to those in whose houses lay sick and dying men and women. Now Joseph and his family were of little account in Nazareth. So only a few heeded this tale, and those few, after much talk, came to believe in it. They went themselves to the carpenter's hut and their leaders spoke courteous words to him, saying: "We are told that thy son knoweth the secrets of healing and hath raised up his sister through their power from the bed of sickness which held her fast."

"Yea," Joseph answered proudly. "Behold, she runneth and leapeth in my garden. Yet, in past days, she was so sorely smitten she was like to die of a fever and could neither raise hand nor limb, but lay in a sorry weakness."

There came a murmur of joy and astonishment from the watching people as they listened to this saying, and speaking with one voice, they prayed Joseph to send his son Jesus to them with his herbs and his simples, so that their kin might live also.

"He healeth not with herbs and simples. It was through some virtue of his body and his spirit that his sister was made whole."

"That cannot be," said the leader of these folk, and they shook their heads in doubt. "Only herbs and the bleeding of the afflicted can drive out this fever."

"It was through this virtue Jesus healed Leah," repeated Joseph. "I do not lie."

"Nay, nay, we accept thy word, and we pray thee summon thy son, so that he may come with us and drive this fever from our dwellings."

And Joseph answered: "He is abroad in this hour. But I will declare the matter to him on his return."

"We will pay him well if he doth cure our sick," these neighbours promised, and then withdrew from the presence of the carpenter.

.....

The counsel of Heli was sharply cut, as with a graver's tool in the imagination of Jesus, as he returned home after the leave-taking. So his mind was prepared for his father's tale of the folk who sought for a physician who could heal their sick.

"I may not visit these ailing men and women," he made answer. "Tell them I do not heal and should not, therefore, be accounted a physician."

"Art thou afeared that thou wilt fail? But thou possessest some strange virtue that assuredly preserved the life of Leah."

"Yea, that is true."

"Haram, the fish merchant, is within. He prayeth for thy speedy service, else will his young wife perish."

"I am not suffered to serve the sick in this hour."

"Haram is of great account in Nazareth, and he will, peradventure, make me the

builder of his boats if thou wilt aid him thus in his hour of need."

"My time is not yet come," said Jesus, and he turned away sighing wearily, for his promise to Heli weighed heavily upon him now that he learned of the many entreaties of afflicted people who sought his aid.

Joseph pressed the lad hard, not commanding as a father, but praying Jesus in the name of his family, of his mother, and in the name of the fishermen's despair to succour them in this time of terror.

And sweat stood out upon the lad's brow, he clenched his hands, silently praying as Mary, joining her husband, strove also to win an answer.

"Nay, it cannot be." He broke loose from his hold and sought, in his trouble, for the path to the uplands. But Joseph pursued him, crying: "The neighbours will hold me to account for this unkindness of thine. We shall suffer because thou art set in this stubborn pride and givest no thought to the afflicted. Even if thou dost fail we will not blame thee. Howsoever, great is thy power. Thou didst draw Leah out of the jaws of death, so thou hast no cause for fear."

"Yea, but Leah loved me and believed in me as if I were an angel. These folk, who are sick, know only that I am the son of a carpenter, an idler condemned in past days by both schoolmaster and scribe, so vain would be any labour of mine for them." With these words  us went from the presence of Mary and Joseph, and the two were alone, gazing to the scarce stars, gazing vainly downwards into the purple cup of night.

CHAPTER XLI

Haram the fish merchant commanded a strange carpenter to build his boats, and he caused knowledge of this hire to be borne to Joseph. It was met with silence on his part while Mary murmured: "It is the will of God, we must be satisfied."

Seven days had passed since Jesus went into the night, and still there were no tidings of him. On the eighth morning Joseph's sister came in haste to their dwelling, and her dress was all disordered, her veil awry. She told them of the passing of the merchant for whom Clopas laboured. "He was stricken by the fever," she declared; "and behold, this sorrowful death striketh at our heart, at our very life. For in this season of death no other merchant will hire Clopas, and we shall soon, therefore, be hard pressed for bread."

As she lamented Mary called to mind the many small sums of money Mary Clopas had given unto her in past years. Joseph was proud and did not know of these borrowings. So now his wife confessed to them and spoke of the little store of money presented by the Pharisee. 'Yea, render the purse of silver pieces to Mary,' he cried; "they will buy bread until such time as Clopas discovers other work or receives what is owing to him."

Mary Clopas answered: "But the Pharisee made a gift of his purse to Jesus. How can ye give me what is not yours?"

Joseph's face darkened as she spoke, but his wife said: "He gave this little store to me; for it is his desire that it should not be guarded, that it should be spent on those who have need of it."

Then Mary Clopas received a portion of these monies and went her way rejoicing. But the two who remained behind gazed with deep sadness at one another. "He cometh not," they muttered, sighing and then ceased, having no heart for further speech.

However, on the ninth day, Jesus appeared on the threshold of his home. Hunger was written upon his brow, his bones started from his flesh; and his body trembled with weakness and weariness. Joseph laid down his tools, hastened towards his son, crying out words of welcome: and he told Mary to make a mess of pottage, and set before the lad the precious wine that in a small measure was kept in that household for anyone who might

fall sick or swoon away. And as Mary joyfully busied herself, making ready the meal, Joseph fetched a pitcher of water and bathed his son's bleeding, dust-stained feet, cooled his brow, and then laid him down, gently bidding him rest.

For a while he slept. Greatly was he refreshed when Mary bade him rise up and eat of the pottage and drink of the wine she set upon the board. As the other children entered the

dwelling she gave them each their share of bread, their midday meal, and they ate in silence, watching Jesus, listening to the talk of their elders.

Mary learned that Jesus had passed these days in the barren ways where wander a few sheep, where the hills are parched and bare, where he could only nourish himself with wild berries, and even these were scarce. The lad did not speak of his purpose in straying thus in the lonely places, and neither his father nor his mother dared question him concerning his doings in that time. But Thomas rose up from the board, crying out: "While Jesus was away in the hills I laboured for thee, my father. Never, at any time, have I disobeyed thee. But Jesus goeth where he listeth and disobeyeth thine express commands. And when at last, having wearied of his idle ways, he cometh again to thy board, meat and wine are set before him, while we eat this sour bread. All the best that is in the house hath been bestowed on him-clean raiment, good cheer, fine words. Truly, it would seem that my labour is in vain. The unworthy and not the worthy are held in honour in our home."

"We feared that Jesus would no more return; we feared that the wild beasts among the rocks had devoured him," cried Mary.

"Yea, that be why we bade him welcome," said Joseph. "He, who is lost, is found, he whom we deemed dead, is alive again."

"Sour bread and buttermilk! Such are my wages for these days of labour," muttered Thomas. "Nay, I will have no more of it. I will go to Tiberias or to Caesarea Philippi. I will hire myself to a craftsman there."

Joseph followed after his son, snatching at his coat as he went from the house in angry haste. And so firm was his grasp Thomas halted and hearkened. His father besought him to abide in the household, saying: "All that I have is thine, son. Thou hast but to ask what thou desirest and thy mother will set it before thee. Thou art the staff upon which we lean. In all matters of account we turn to thee and reckon upon thy true worth. But come, rejoice with us now. For Jesus, whom we love, is in the midst of us again, and will, if thou art generous of heart, no more stray from his home."

With an ill grace Thomas came again to the board. But he refused to drink what remained of the wine and would not join with his brethren or with his parents in their joyful talk. From that hour the younger brother was set against the elder.

CHAPTER XLII

The songs of the gay Galileans turned to cries of hunger, their pipes and their music to the voices of them that weep. For a lean winter followed the scourging fevers of summer, and want passed like a sceptre through the sheltered valleys, and across the slopes that bent down into the kindly lake. Food was scarce throughout the known world, and overseers came from the Gentile towns, bearing wallets of silver pieces. They gave high prices for the scanty harvest; and all the land of Galilee was gleaned from end to end by these covetous men of the towns. Few were enriched and many were brought low. The poor perished from cold and hunger in the month the sun dies, and the bitter winds visit the world.

And now because a few had increased their wealth, work was plentiful for the carpenter and his son. New houses were built, while famished herdsmen and husbandmen pined and dropped by the way. Joseph would not put by any of the monies he had earned, he bought a small share of grain and of figs at great price and gave them to the needy, the travelers and the orphans who soon infested his home and sought him out in all hours and seasons.

When his kin admonished him for such bountifulness he answered: "Be faithful to thy neighbour in his poverty, so that thou mayest rejoice in his prosperity. If I forget the fatherless and widows in their dire need let thistles grow instead of wheat and cockle flowers instead of barley in the garden of my life. If I close my doors to the hungry

stranger let my saw be blunt at the edge, my chisel rust and my plane break upon the pine wood, the blade of the axe turn against me and my children."

Shaking their heads, Joseph's kin went silently away. But in corners, in twos and three, such men and women whispered: "His hour of beggary and want is at hand, and assuredly, in the time it comes we shall not succour him; for his folly is without reason, and he must pay for it in full measure."

Joseph, Thomas and Jesus laboured far into the night for the rich husbandmen. And then, at each day's end, with their earnings, Mary fed the hungry who came from the hills, the women and children and the fisher folk. For even the little fishes hid themselves away in that dark winter, and the fishermen returned each evening to the shore with empty nets and empty bellies. However, with the coming of spring, the time of famine passed; but now Joseph paid in sickness for his hard labours. The old pain in his back and loins returned; he had never been whole since his fall into the well, and this hurt sorely plagued him in this time he lay upon his bed, and could not rise from it.

So Thomas, now a comely youth, became the master-carpenter and Jesus served under him and sought to obey his commands in all that pertained to the craft of wood. But his hands were without skill, his mind did not possess the craftsman's cunning, could not straightly guide the saw, delicately shape the lintel, or smooth the hard and soft wood with the plane. Fierce were the upbraidings of Thomas, who was truly pained by what was, in his eyes, a gross foolishness, a want of wit in his elder brother. For Thomas had the carpenter's soul, and that soul was wronged to its depths by this hewer of wood, "this dolt, who would as lief sever a board with the blunt side of a saw, and would always set a crooked edge to the timber."

Such was the saying, uttered each evening by Joseph's son when he visited his father's sick bed. And Joseph would softly answer: "Be not hard on Jesus, son Thomas. He is like unto his mother, who, in her youth, was a dreamer, and in no season hath she been skilful with her hands in the labour of the household. But thou art truly my son; for thou hast inherited from me the gift of the woodsman, the carpenter and the moulder, and I am a glad and proud father because thou wilt be the solace of my age, my support in my weakness. Wherefore, because thou art brave and wise, and swift as the waters in thy discernment of our craft, be kind in thy words and in thy dealings with Jesus. For thy mother telleth me that he doth strive to conquer his dullness and the clumsy manners of his hands, which will ever be unskillful. Pity thy brother, for he can never be of any account. In no trade will he attain to any skill, so he remains among the lowly, and, peradventure, will fail even to earn what will set him up as the head of a household in times to come."

This counsel of Joseph's caused Thomas to become puffed up and proud, and he openly scorned Jesus and led his younger brothers, James, Seth and Juda to make mock of him. All now worked in wood, and on occasions, in stone, and to Jesus was allotted the task of carrying the wood or the stone, of waiting upon his brethren. For they feared, with reason, that he might spoil their work, and they were skilful, seeming with but little instruction to know how to plane, shape, carve and raise up huts and homes for men.

Heli was gone four seasons when Jesus said to his mother: "A shepherd, who was succoured by us in the winter season, biddeth me go with him to the hills and promiseth to make a herdsman of me. If it be thy will I would gladly accompany him. For the hills are as good friends to my understanding, and the starry heavens are to me a kindlier roof than any shaped by the hand of man."

And Mary besought him not to go into the wilderness, saying: "The robbers slay shepherds, and the keeping of sheep is a lowly work for one who is a carpenter's son. Such is thy father's belief, for in one season I spoke of such a calling for thee. But he will have none of it, and I am now agreed with him in this matter."

So Jesus consented to remain in the carpenter's shop; and he continued to be the servant of his brethren, meeting their scorn with silence, or their sharp mockery with a merry song.

Seth said to Thomas: "Jesus should be cast down and ashamed, but he goes gaily all the day."

"Yea, he is a man of joy who should of a truth be sober and mourn his shortcomings," declared James. "He doth not even observe the Sabbath. I perceived him in the company of our cousins, James and Joses, wantonly breaking it, labouring in those hours of rest for Mary Clopas, aiding her in her home. Also, on three Sabbaths, he hath not gone to worship

at the synagogue, but chose the road into the hills, and was gone from sunrise till sunset."

And these brethren went to their father and complained of the wickedness of their brother. They had seen him aid a husbandman, whose goats were ailing, giving them a potion of herbs to drink that was brewed on the seventh day. They had perceived Jesus carrying a weighty burden of wood from the groves to an old woman's hut, a task that was again a violation of the Sabbath.

On hearing these reproaches Joseph summoned Jesus and asked him to give an account of his ways. "The woman was stricken with years," said Jesus; "and she earneth her scanty bread by selling boughs and leaves to the neighbours. I cannot aid her on the other six days, for I labour in the workshop and I would not have her suffer hunger or be sorrowful and fearful because of her need. Verily, a merry heart is a virtue beyond price of rubies."

Joseph broke in upon this saying: "Six days thou shalt work, and on the seventh thou shalt rest. In eating time and harvest thou shalt rest. Heed the commandment and rouse not up scandal against thee. Thou knowest the wages of such sin." With these and other stern words the carpenter admonished his son, who listened in silence.

Now not all the tally of offences had been recited by the brethren. On two mornings in the week Jesus rose up before sunrise and journeyed into the hills. He returned an hour before noon. So, however busy the workshop, the time of his labour was lost on these clays. And on the sixth day, because of an agreement with Joseph, Jesus now served the old woman, bearing to her the gleanings of the groves, and receiving the blessing of a joyful heart.

Thomas and James were somewhat straightly fashioned in their understanding. Save on the Sabbath and in hours devoted to sleep and food they laboured with a peculiar industry. For the one purpose was set in their imagination, and it was like the light of one candle. Whereas the glimmer of many candles illumined the spirit of Jesus. Piece by piece Thomas was laying by a store of monies that would in time be in such plenty he could fulfil his dream. He desired to depart from Nazareth and to set up as a master craftsman in Jerusalem with hired men to do his bidding. He yearned for that season of ripeness when he would be head of a household, possessing a wife and many children, respected for his prosperity and the richness of his raiment and his board. James also desired to live in Jerusalem, but for another purpose. He was ever sober and earnest of mien, and his imagination mourned for Israel's bondage. It was his purpose to live within three hundred cubits of the Temple so that he might visit its courts daily and offer up long prayers therein to Jehovah.

These two brothers were as two oxen within one yoke, and sought to pull their burden though all the hours, and in such manner draw their dream near to its accomplishment. But Jesus took no pleasure in being thus yoked and would not share in their stern and sober purpose. He was light of heart. sang at his labour, and thus roused a testy humour in his brethren who added anger to their contempt for him. Because Joseph, who was still sick, refused to admonish Jesus again, they consulted with the Scribe of Nazareth, who promised that he would watch this light minded fellow, whom he prophesied might well end his days in dark sin and in a loose manner of life.

One day Mary drew Jesus aside and said: "These two years thy father hath been ailing, and his pains do not lessen, nay, they increase with the coming of the warm days that should bring healing. I pray thee exercise that secret power thou didst summon for Leah, which so graciously made her whole."

Jesus was troubled by his mother's demand; by reason of his love for her it was hard to refuse her prayer. So, despite the warning received by him upon the hills, he consented, and promised to entreat the healing power on the first day of the week at sunset in the time the brethren bore their carpentry to the house of a merchant.

All was made ready by Mary and by Joseph's sister in the sick man's chamber. With eager faith these two women watched Jesus as he mused awhile and then softly prayed, murmuring certain sayings of which they had no understanding. In a little while he approached Joseph and conjured the evil that was within him and corrupted his bones, to come forth and go hence, no more returning to its lodgment in the flesh.

The watching women saw a light like rays of sun spring from the body of Jesus, and he bent downwards so that these might fall upon Joseph, might pierce his body as with spears. And, in the after time, Mary Clopas declared that a cloud hung about her brother, and this light seemed to be lost in its mist. It could not enter and find the stricken part, for there was no faith in Joseph. He would not believe, for the scorn of Thomas and James and what they called the 'wanton ways of Jesus' had changed his understanding. All the

gathered might of the youth struggled vainly with this dark doubt. He breathed heavily, he conjured the evil once again to come out of the man. Sweat and tears coursed down his checks, and whiteness changed and aged his countenance. But such great labours did not avail, still Joseph lay there groaning because of his pains, his uneasy and distrustful eyes fastened upon the door, and then again upon his son.

"I can no more. Between thee and me is no bridge builded."

With these whispered words Jesus sank down beside the hearth and lay there spent and broken. In the doorway stood Thomas and James. They had witnessed this last great endeavour of their brother, and their questioning scorn, joined to their father's want of faith had, at the last, wholly defeated that gracious light of which Jesus was as the steel and tinder, a light that comes from the High and Lofty One, but can only be bestowed on those who open their understanding to it.



CHAPTER XLIII

And now even Mary began to doubt and to question her belief, cherished in secret and nourished by her sister, that Jesus had been chosen for a high destiny. She listened to the mocking words of Thomas who declared that his elder brother was a hypocrite, seeking with specious claims to set himself apart from others and idle through the swiftly flowing days.

In this season the Scribe of Nazareth visited Joseph and said to him: "Keep a watch upon Jesus, for though he hath not, in these last days, broken the Sabbath, he converseth in the evening with the strangers and Gentiles-travelers-who gather about the well, when they lodge for a night in Nazareth; also, he is much with a certain publican whose company should not be sought by any devout member of our tribe. He had with him James and Joses, sons of Mary Clopas. Speak unto her concerning them, for thy son Jesus will lead the them astray.

Now Joseph was much provoked, but he feared lest Jesus should depart from his home and become a shepherd, if he spoke hardly to him. However, one evening, Thomas came with swift flowing words upon his tongue, as is ever the way with the bearers of base sayings. "Behold, Jesus hath again broken the Sabbath, and verily others know of it. Wherefore, he will shame us in the eyes of the congregation, and because of his sin they may withdraw both their esteem and their hire from us."

Thomas had scarcely ended when Jesus entered the chamber. Joseph commanded Thomas to withdraw, and then said gently: "I have learned from thy brother that thou hast again broken the law."

"I discovered that the old wise hearted woman, who tended so many in sickness, lay within her hut in a heavy fever," Jesus eagerly answered, "and after the heat came a great cold, as I watched by her. Wherefore, knowing that such a chill might cause her to die, I gathered sticks and kindled a fire that gave back warmth and life. Also I brewed a potion that would drive the pains from her limbs. Is such a deed evil? Is it an offence against God?"

"It is written thou shalt not kindle a fire in thy habitation on the Sabbath day. Son, ill is this deed of thine. For it is not the first offence. Thou hast broken the commandments that concern the seventh day in several seasons at several times."

"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath," cried Jesus, and then ceased, for as a gusty wind smites a tree, so did choler smite his body, causing his limbs to quiver and to tremble.

Despite Joseph's bidding Thomas had eavesdropped, and now casting dissimulation from him, stood within the chamber and shewed the heat of his temper in hasty words.

"This is blasphemy. Thou dost pollute our home with thy lewd sayings, and we know from whence they come. Thou hast consorted with the unclean, with Gentile travelers and with publicans. Thou wilt bring ruin upon us if thou dost continue in this manner of life. We are hired by our own people; and when they watch thee and perceive thy many blackslidings and hearken to thy profane words they will turn their faces from us, nay, more, they will cast us out of Nazareth." Here Thomas halted to gather again his spent breath and as one dog takes up the call of another, James began to reproach Jesus, saying: "On three Sabbaths thou wentest abroad upon the hills and did not visit the

synagogue."

And Jesus swiftly answered: "Is God nearer in the synagogue or upon the mountain top? Verily, verily, I find Him always on the heights, but not always within the place of worship. He is in the loveliness of the sunrise, in the hush before light cometh. His Spirit floweth to mine in the peace of the lilies of the field, cometh across the silver waters of the lake, from the towered peaks of Gilboa, from the white snows of Carmel, from all the mist hung hills

and vales of Galilee and from the wide deeps of the heavens. He is with me in the dawn, near as no other is near. In the quiet places I may seek that close communion and in all surely find it. To be alone with God I must be far from men."

James and Thomas both sought to make an answer at the one time, so Joseph raised his hand, thus commanding silence from them all. And he sought to interpret the plaints of his two sober and industrious sons, saying: "Jesus, I forgave the prodigal who deserted his kin and his home. I believed that such forgiveness would soften him and change his manner of life. But that, alas, is not so. The prodigal son continueth to be unjust in his dealings with his brothers. Thou didst break the Sabbath to gather boughs for the old woman because, according to thy word, there was no time in the other six days in which thou mightest labour for her. 'Yet, on two mornings of the week thou does wast away in the hills whilst thy brothers virtuously laboured. Is that fair or just to them?'

"In the time I serve the saw and the plane I earn my share of bread," Jesus answered. But Joseph heeded not this saying and continued to admonish him for his idleness and praise his brothers for their virtuous toil. Whereupon, the fire of speech blazed forth from Jesus once again, and even the noisy Thomas was compelled to yield and to withdraw into the sheltering silence before such flame.

"If ye labour in all times and seasons for the meat which perisheth ye cannot labour for the meat which endureth unto Everlasting Life. Down here in the valley ye seek bread for the belly. Upon the mountain top I seek the bread of God. Thomas, I read the scroll of thy heart and perceive that thou art not content with the day's earnings, but layest in a store, silver piece by silver piece, so that in a later season, thou canst be the head of a household, the father of many children, the master of a fine workshop, who commandeth many workmen in Jerusalem. And thou, James, labourest also for a blind desire-layest up monies so that thou mayest have enough to grant thee a place in Jerusalem, so that thou mayest save thy soul by uttering long prayers in the Temple and by making rich offerings. But know that, as thou canst learn the Hebrew letters by rote and not by understanding, so canst thou utter prayers by rote and not from the heart. And will the High and Loft One only draw near to thee when thou art in a Holy Place? Doth He abide only in the Temple? Is He not also in the hills? Is He not as easily found on the slopes of our land of Galilee and beside the waters of the lake? Wherever there be peace and stillness there be the road that leadeth to Him. "

James hung his head, ashamed and abashed, because his brother thus read his heart. But Thomas was slow in discernment, and, held by his desires, he spoke yet again of the slothful ways of Jesus and declared that he wronged his ailing father and his mother by thus wandering into the hills, and be ended with the saying: "Thou seekest ever the easy, idle way. Thou seekest only thy pleasure and dost scorn our honest toil."

Then Jesus gazed sadly upon his brother. "We lay in the same womb with but a year between us, Thomas; and yet, naught will draw us together that we may perceive the same vision. Thou art set against me. Of what avail is any defence of mine? But answer me this. Is not the understanding greater than the body? Is not the life more than the labour?"

 And Thomas spoke scornfully: "Nay, I will not answer such foolish riddles. I will not contend further with thy froward courses. Our father must choose between me and thee. We can no more work together at the same craft, or inhabit the same dwelling."

With these words Joseph's son passed beneath the lintel of the door, shook the dust from his sandals and went down the road that led to Nazareth and to the house of the Scribe.

CHAPTER XLIV

Now when it was evening and the moon stroked the hills with light, men and youths gathered about the well which lay in the centre of Nazareth. The day's toil was done. All were weary of body and desired to refresh their minds according to their measure. They

stood in clusters here and there; and it was customary with Jesus to go from one circle to another hearkening to wise and foolish speech. The husbandmen spoke of the furrow and of the plough, wheat and other seeds that rest in the earth and wake in the spring time. The oxdrivers conversed of kine and their fodder, of the heavy load that received but small monies. The keepers of the vineyards told of the caprice of the vines, spoke of the richness of the grape harvest and of the wines that they brewed. Or they complained of the insects

that invaded the growing plants and caused scarcity, destroying the budding fruits. And those who possessed olive groves uttered wise sentences concerning these ancient trees, while here and there a smith spoke of the heat of his furnace, the pattern of the metal, or a potter would disclose the secrets of the clay and speak of the fashioning and moulding of vessels.

The fishermen, who came to the place of the gathering, mourned because of the age of their boats, the holes in their nets, and spoke of golden seasons in other years and other times. Then would the shoals of fish so cumber the boats they would almost sink beneath the load, and fair prices were given for their catch in the former days; but in the present times only small was the take and hard was the barter of the merchants and those who bought the salted fish for the Gentile towns. And all these labourers would gossip concerning one another, and the silent Jad, Jesus, would observe the small measure of charity and the great measure of baseness in their sayings. In time, he came to believe that hatred rather than love was the image that man bore in his heart. He was glad if travelers came to Nazareth, and resting a night or more in the town, found their way to the Well. For they spoke of far lands, of the battles of the Romans, of great cities, and of the manners of the heathen. Therefore, by reason of this marvellous spirit, Jesus harvested much knowledge of the ways and dreams of men.

And so his lips were unsealed, and he would, from time to time, in this last season of summer, gather a circle of youths about him and speak to them in grave sentences, in dark and light parables.

James, Joses, Simon and Jude, the sons of Mary Clopas, never failed to be of his company in those evenings when his tongue was loosed. He told tales of birds, beasts and flowers, and shaped parables concerning the warring kingdoms of the earth. And the sons of Mary Clopas were caught within the spell of his enchanted speech, and would implore him, evening after evening, to weave further tales about the kings of the heathen, about their battles and the vanity of such striving, also they would learn of the measure allotted to wise and wicked husbandmen and craftsmen, to those who sowed, to those who gave their days to learning, to the rich and the poor, the beggar, the orphan, the nobleman and die possessor of many flocks and herds.

After a while tidings of the lovely sayings uttered by Jesus spread among the young men. So the circle about him increased in number, and he did not know the faces of all who came to hearken.

On the evening when he received the rebuke of his brethren he went, as was his wont, to the meeting place about the Well. His mind was troubled and away in that hour as he spoke to certain of the youths who clamoured for a parable. So he did not perceive that Haraim, the fish merchant, was the speaker who questioned him after the first tale had been recounted.

"Tell us of the hills above Nazareth, of what leadeth thee to them in the dawn?"

To this question the lips of Jesus fashioned an answer which his straying spirit would not have shaped in another hour. ""

"And dost thou conduct thyself according to thy father's instruction," inquired Haraim.

"Yea, I keep His commandments and dwell in His love."

And now the Scribe of Nazareth pressed close to the merchant and set subtle words in his mouth. "Where is this father of thine?"

e is in me and I am in Him. The world doth not know my Father. But a time will come when the people will seek His wisdom in the lonely hills, and will find Him even as I have found Him." It was as if Jesus inhabited a dream while he spoke thus, for the vision of the Lofty One was shaped in his soul, casting out sorrow, filling it with peace. He did not heed the world or perceive the snares laid for him by these two crafty men. And he spoke further of the mystery of his Father, revealing secrets which had so far been holden within his understanding.

CHAPTER XLV

Joseph and Mary uttered grave sentences as they held one another's hands in the dimness

of the inner chamber. They spoke of the years of youth, the years that were over and would never come again; they communed together, softly and sadly, concerning those days when they were all to one another, neither children nor sickness coming between, setting doubts in their imagination, harassing and fretting their great love.

When the speech of remembrance ceased, the heart of Joseph turned towards Thomas and stayed with this son whom he loved dearly, for he perceived himself in him. And he said: 'Jesus shall seek out the herds and become a shepherd as he was minded in a past season. Truly he may not abide any more in our home.'

"Nay, I would not lose my first born while still he is in his tender youth," cried Mary. "He shall not go from us at the command of Thomas."

"And what of my command?" asked Joseph.

"No son of ours shall in later years have cause to declare that he was driven from his home. It is as a nest we have shaped for all our children. And if one were cast out from it he would journey down the years in the bitterness of a remembrance that could not die."

"Jesus shall seek another trade, he shall go from among us," Joseph declared, beating the earthen floor with the staff that stood beside his bed.

However, Mary was, in this matter, of a firm temper and would not lose her hold of the purpose that filled her mind. "We are as one while all abide thus under this roof. We shall be twain if Jesus is thus cut off, and goeth away when it is against his will." And these were not the last of Mary's words. She uttered many others, entreating Joseph to grant her this one gift, her first born, and not in heat to banish him.

The carpenter held his peace until her crying ceased. Then he told her to call Jesus to them, and he said: "Son, thou desirest to be a shepherd, and I will not hold thee back any more. Now I am prepared to bid thee go from me with my blessing."

"Nay, my friend of the hills hath hired a man of Bethany for a herdsman, so there is no place for me with him. And I would abide at home, for now I know my business is among the people of Nazareth."

On this evening Jesus was uplifted because he had learned that certain youths of wild and evil habit had changed the ordering of their lives, turning to virtuous ways, after listening to the parables and tales recounted by him. They were the first fruits of those strange and lovely sayings set upon his lips by his Father.

And Mary was glad when she learned that Jesus desired to remain in his home. She uttered no words, but besought Joseph with a sign of her hands to be merciful.

"Son Jesus, play no more the prodigal. Be wise and industrious as are thy brethren. And now, prithee, rest there upon the hearth while I make fast the peace in this household." And having thus declared Mary's will, her husband bade her summon his second son.

Though his sandals were loosed, the loins of Thomas were girded as for a journey, and he laid the pack that held his tools upon the earthen floor at the foot of the bed.

In silence Joseph stroked his hand, gazing proudly upon this youth who looked a man. For despite his years, his beard was long and black, and his body was broad and straight as the oak of the forest.

"Thou art as my first born. I love and trust thee as no other."

And Thomas answered: "Yea, my father, then I may continue to abide in the workshop and labour for thee and for my mother and sisters?"

"There shall ever be room for all my sons at my board," said Joseph; "shelter and a resting place for each one of them." And he might have said more but Thomas spoke swiftly:

"Then I go hence. I follow the road that leads to Tiberias."

"Nay, nay," cried Joseph.

"Thou hast chosen." With these words the young carpenter took up his pack and sought the door of the house. And before passing hence he cast a bitter saying at his brother that was like a viper's thrust. "There is not room for me and thee at our father's board, or beneath the same roof. For we are strangers and may not any more abide in the one place."

Jesus made no answer. He raised his head and gazed at Thomas who could not bold his eyes but went in haste, not staying even at the gate to latch his sandals.



CHAPTER XLVI

Sunset came, and there were no tidings of Thomas; and Joseph lamented through all the hours because he had lost his beloved. He declared that now want and beggary would be their portion, inasmuch as Jesus was unskillful and James, and his twin brothers Seth and Juda were still of such youth they could not serve as master carpenters. Mary broke as a bough before tempest, and her husband cast reproaches at Jesus who sought to comfort his mother, saying: "The morrow will take care of itself. Behold the sparrows who perch upon the eaves, they do not harvest grain and lay it by in barns. They gather what is needful from day to day. Let us trust our Heavenly Father even as these birds, even as the trees, and the flowers that come in spring." But he might not continue such speech; for Joseph commanded him to be silent and not speak foolishly to his elders.

Then lanterns glimmered in the dark night without the hut, voices murmured and muttered through the gusty wind. Fearful and troubled, Mary unbarred the door, believing that strangers or beggars of ill repute alone could knock at such an hour.

The Scribe of Nazareth and Thomas came within. Thomas spoke with authority, bidding his mother and Jesus rest in the outer chamber while he led the Scribe into his father's presence.

Long time they were closeted with Joseph, while Mary watched sorrowfully, remaining silent. She scarcely knew what she feared; but her heart had not been so heavy since those days of need when she begged at Miriam's door.

After a while the elder and the younger man came again, and they went into the garden whispering to one another; but no word was borne to the hearing of the watching mother. Thomas returned without the Scribe, and having fastened the bolts once more he bade Jesus seek Joseph. "For there is much my father would declare to thee."

Mary would have followed them, but Thomas laid his hands gently upon her shoulders, thrusting her back into the living room, a "It is forbidden. What my father saith unto Jesus is not for women's ears." Whereupon he closed the door, latching it, and Mary must perforce remain beside her sleeping daughters. They lay there with countenances like the images of peace; not stirring while their tormented mother moved to and fro, counting her steps, measuring the length of her shadow upon the wall. She could not fashion any words, or even pray in silence in that hour of fear.

And when Jesus stood within the small chamber Joseph fastened the eyes of a stranger upon him and said: "Thou hast wrought a great evil, and we know not what will be the end of it."

"If I have sinned I am ignorant of the offence."

"Hearken, and I will declare my grievous complaint. Behold, in the days when I was espoused to thy mother she was found with child. And because of the base hearts of certain women in Nazareth much talk was made. One housewife declared that she should be made a public example. So I took her away to the Place of the Stranger, and in due season she gave birth to thee. Now I was only known in Nazareth for my fine craftsmanship, so I must needs return to this town, that I might earn our daily bread. And this coming again to our own place was not easy for us, inasmuch as the goodwives persuaded their husbands to withhold themselves from my company. Scarce was the labour and hard indeed our lot in those days. But time is like unto sleep, it blotteth out base sayings from remembrance and after a while we came to live in peace and to prosper. But now thou hast, with thy foolish an wanton speech, waked the old serpent, roused it out of the sleep of the past."

"I knew naught concerning my birth," cried Jesus; so how could I offend?"

"Haraim declareth to the neighbours that thou didst speak of thy father who walked with thee upon the hills, and not privily, but to the young men who gather about the well after sunset. Wherefore, grave hath been this scandal, and it is said that thou wouldest lead the youth of Nazareth into evil ways."

"I spake not of an earthly father," said Jesus; "I named the High and Lofty One. Behold, my God cometh to me upon the hills in the silence, and we commune together concerning the labour that shall be mine in the coming years. Is it sin to speak with the Highest, and then to deliver His words to the young men of Nazareth? They do not know I spake of God. And the Scribe and Haraim have but twisted my sayings, so that they may smite me and drive me from the town."

"Thou canst not any more abide in Nazareth."

"Nay, I would not flee away as if I had committed some offence, as if I were ashamed. I am minded to abide here and face these hypocrites who are of the world and hearken only to the evil desires in their hearts."

"For thy mother's sake it is needful that thou shouldst depart speedily and secretly from Nazareth. Haraim saith that thou hast openly declared her shame." Being roused by fear, Joseph spoke in heat and would not listen to further speech, but bade Jesus begone in the dawn before the people stirred abroad.

And Jesus answered: "Then it is thy desire that my brethren shall no more be my brethren, that my mother shall be as a stranger to me?"

"Yea," cried Joseph; "but for a while only. Peradventure, a time will come when thou mayest return and we can welcome thee again. But many seasons must pass before the people have this shame wholly loosed from their remembrance."

"Then I will depart from Nazareth, and I will seek my brethren and my mother among strangers."

Jesus went swiftly to the door. There he tarried, waiting perhaps for the word of recall, or of blessing. No blessing was spoken. And he passed into the outer room, where he would not answer the eager questions and prayers of his mother. Setting his lips upon her lips he bade her rest in peace, then sought the one other room in the house, and there laid himself down as if to sleep.

 speech passed between the two brothers when Thomas also came and lay close by, seeking slumber. However, he alone saw Jesus rise in the darkness before cockcrow and go from his home, journeying softly down the narrow path, passing into the mists of dawn.

CHAPTER XLVII

In the morning that followed the back biters of Nazareth learned that Jesus had departed from their town; and for six days they spoke much of his going, and whispered dark sentences concerning the wickedness which the Scribe, Haraim and the schoolmaster declared had been sown in him by reason of his birth. They praised the virtuous sons of Joseph, saying they were examples to all the youth of Nazareth because of their good father and their brave toil in the workshop. So the tale that had been told against Jesus bore prosperity to his brethren, as, having learned of them in this fashion, many curious persons came with their custom; and Thomas was mightily uplifted, and joy reigned in the household.

Only Mary was sorrowful and silent. Joseph would not impart any knowledge of what was spoken in his chamber on the night the Scribe of Nazareth came to it even as some untimely blast from the north enters the vineyards, smiting them. Once Mary named Jesus. But the dumb anger shewn by Thomas and the distraught manner of Joseph caused her to withdraw into silence again. She was afraid, feeling the oppression of an evil happening. Old remembrance of that time at the inn, of the days of her espousal and of that other season of great unhappiness after the birth of her first born, smote her imagination and she dared not seek out Jesus, or stir abroad, or endeavour in any manner to unravel the mystery of his going.

However, on the seventh day following his flight, she passed through Nazareth, bearing to

the house of Clopas a robe she had woven for his wife. Once she was in the company of this good woman she declared her mournful tale.

Mary Clopas possessed a tender heart, and even the wild birds would draw near to her. All trusted her charity and knew the mercy of her speech. And, as in other seasons, she was a true comforter to the frail and fearful Mary.

"Jesus abideth within, and hath rested here since the morning he departed from his home."

His mother cried out joyfully, but Mary Clopas stayed her cries with a sign of her hand; and she declared the evil happening that had led Jesus to her door in the dawn.

And now joy passed. Mary was no more mirthful and clamorous, demanding that she should see her son. She ceased on the instant and seemed to shrivel like a flower beneath the fiery rays of noon.

Long time these two women abode in silence, and heaviness brooded over that hearth. Darkness filled her imagination. Baleful shapes were gathered into its vision. Mary could not find a way. For, as she suddenly declared to her sister: "My husband and my four sons stand upon one side and my first born upon another. Between them is a gulf fixed, and I must choose-cast in my lot with Jesus or with Joseph."

Mary Clopas answered: "I would have openly guarded Jesus, suffering him to come and go, to make my home his home. But my husband said that his enemies would rouse the people against him and he would be stoned. So he abideth here in secret. And in two days' time Clopas will journey on business to Jerusalem and Jesus shall be of his company. He will hire him to a merchant there. Wherefore, come now and speak with thy son and give him thy blessing, so that he may not go hence in bitterness."

"I am afraid," whispered Mary. I durst not gaze upon Jesus, for he will reproach and shame me the more."

"Hast thou forgotten the promise of Gabriel? Dost thou not remember that he declared to thee that thou shouldst bear the Messiah? Call to mind thy lonely dreams, thy walks upon the hills with God."

"For me only sorrow hath sprung from that dream," she answered, "though it was the joy and wonder of my youth. Nay, I fear to look upon Jesus. I will go hence now; and, peradventure, if I journey to the Festival in the company of Thomas and Seth I may, at a later season, encounter him."

"He goeth into a strange world and is to be hired to strangers. It is a lonely road. Canst thou not bring thyself to lay thy hand within his hand, kiss his brow and give him the blessing for which he yearneth?"

Mary made a sign of assent with her head. But she gave only the kiss and the blessing to Jesus. Then because her heart was too full for speech she hastened from that house, passing swiftly through Nazareth, looking neither to the right nor to the left until she came to her own place again.

CHAPTER XLVIII

James, Joses, Simon and Jude bore to Jesus the sayings of the people of Nazareth. They told of the falling away of the young men who had listened to his parables and had been his followers. These now from fear also betrayed their young master, agreeing with the slanders uttered concerning Jesus by the Scribe, Haraim, the schoolmaster and certain of the women folk.

The sons of Mary Clopas welcomed their cousin, sought to serve him, and declared that they would be his brethren. But even their love could not rouse Jesus from his first dark melancholy. He was like a bird whose wing is broken by a fowlers' snare. He had no power over himself in those days; and Mary Clopas knew that his mind was set against the journey to Jerusalem and this service with a merchant. He desired to go far from men, escaping from the evil thoughts, the base sayings that were seemingly knit into their very flesh and heart.

"The world cannot receive the Spirit of Truth because it seeth him not, neither knoweth

him. From henceforth my speech shall be 'yea' and 'nay' when I am in the world, or with the world; and I shall no more speak of my Heavenly Father."

Mary Clopas wisely held her peace, not seeking in words to give comfort. She stroked his brow and hands and gazed within, and in that hour her spirit was mingled with his spirit and she knew its bitter woe. "No sorrow is greater and more grievous than the first

sorrow of youth," she said to her husband. "Verily, I tremble for Jesus and beseech thee not to take him to Jerusalem. For there he will meet with the world again, and again will the world bruise him; and in this season his soul is as tender and as easily hurt as his mother's."

"Soon he will be a man and possess a man's hardihood. We may not guard him longer here else he will be discovered, and harm may come to our house and our sons."

Mary Clopas knew that she might not gainsay her husband in this matter. So she declared his will to Jesus. The lad made no answer; but his shoulders were bowed forward by reason of his dread and heaviness of spirit.

And there came a whistle like the call of a lake bird, the sound of a man's song, and then loud knocking upon the door. Jesus who had remained bid all this while within the small inner room, now ran to the outer chamber and opened in haste the housedoor. For he knew that whistle, and had often hearkened to that song.

Heli entered the house, laid down his pack and held out his hands to the lad.

"How didst thou know my need? It is but eight seasons since thou wert with us, and thou didst promise to come in twelve."

"I came at thy call," said Heli.

"But the sound of my voice reacheth not into the deeps of the desert."

"Thou didst summon me night after night. As I sat beside the fire I heard thy call, and though in the first and second evenings I would not heed it, on the third I yielded to thine urgent prayer. So am I here, having journeyed many leagues, and I am weary and well content to find thee again."

"Then thou wilt take me back with thee to the desert?"

"Yea, yea," said Heli; "thou shalt come with me. But first tell me thy great trouble. What hath caused such grievous sorrow?"

"I cannot speak of it now," said Jesus.

"~~Ye~~ a, I have understanding." And sighing the beggar murmured: "The ways of Jehovah ~~are~~ dark, they make me afraid when I shake the dust of the cities from off my feet. The ways of Jehovah are light, they make me glad when I have dwelled for a season among the outcasts in the desert places."

CHAPTER XLIX

At the bidding of Heli Jesus bore pieces of silver in his wallet. He desired to travel upon his feet, with only his staff, a second coat, and food that would suffice for two days. But the elder demanded obedience, so the youth must journey towards the borders of the wilderness, bearing with him a certain sum of money drawn from the store given him in a past time by the wise Pharisee.

When the towns of Syria were behind these two wayfarers the wisdom of the elder became known to his companion; for his feet were bleeding, and towards evening so overcome was his spirit he fell into a swoon. Then Heli waited upon him with great tenderness and caused him to rest at a small inn that stood upon the road to the desert. In the morning strength returned to the lad, but his feet were still swollen. So taking silver coins from the wallet, his companion purchased an ass, setting Jesus thereon. He also stored a bag with dates and with locust meat and fastened bottles of pure water and a vase of buttermilk to the saddle of the beast. Being thus provided they might set forth in search of the Tribe of the Tinkers, who were known also as 'The Desolate' or 'Desert Dogs.'

Now, as Heli declared, these stayed no long time in one place. They sought fresh pastures

from week to week, where they might find wild animals that would give them meat, and fodder for the small goats and camels and the little cows which were their only wealth. In that season the days were warm, the nights cold. So Jesus was glad to wrap himself about in his two coats when the sun was down. He was glad also because of the house of hair borne upon the back of the ass. This Heli planted upon the sandy waste near a cup of rock wherein lay rain water fouled by the wild beasts, yet in such abundance they partook of it

and did not draw any measure of precious water from their store. After they had eaten so great was the weariness of Jesus that, upon the instant, he fell asleep. But the sand was chill and caused him to wake trembling from the cold an hour after the sun had sought its fiery western couch. He opened his eyes upon a strange blue night, and so great was his distress he roused Heli who lay close beside him.

"Thou wilt be sick of a fever if we do riot dig," said the elder. "I knew that thou couldst not endure hardship after the soft warmth of Galilee." Whereupon be bade Jesus cast back the sand; and when they had made a hole of a cubit in depth they came upon warmth again. And obeying his master, the youth laid himself in the hole as in a grave. With the gentleness of a woman he succoured him. Setting the house of hair about the lad, Heli bade him rest, giving him buttermilk to drink.

So the first night passed by Jesus in the wilderness bore him no ill. Heli watched carefully by him, and in time his body hardened. It could withstand the changes of heat and cold, the day and the night.

Now the desert seems pitiless and cruel to the people of the towns. it offers neither food nor drink; it presents to the eye in such regions only withered bushes, dried grasses and this shimmering sand-mountains of sand, towers and great parapets of sand, cliffs of rock that have not changed since God created them, and a deep stillness which is, at times, to the fainting traveler as the desolation of desolations. But then, if he has eaten and drunk, and has been refreshed by sleep, it is wondrous and aids the understanding, causing the heart of man to draw nearer to his Maker. In certain hours God was nearer to His Son, Jesus, than ever before. They were one, merging into that great and everlasting peace which bestowed upon the Son of Man the might of the Spirit, which caused him in later seasons to work miracles and to endure as no other endured, to utter perfect sayings.

Keen pleasure and keen pain were the lot of Jesus in those first weeks passed by him in the wilderness. However, the desert is wide, and the travelers came upon no sign or tidings of the Tribe of the Wanderers. The ass failed daily, for it was not of a wild and hardy breed. One day it fell upon the earth beneath the hot sun. Then, perceiving its hour had come, Heli thrust at its heart with a knife and it lay still.

In that time he was disquieted. "I fear not for myself," was his saying.. "I can endure for a while in regions where there is no water or life of any kind. But I fear for thee, Jesus. Thou art still of the tender fibre of youth and art as soft as the rich pastures of Galilee after the heavy rains."

"I will pray to my Father," the lad answered; "and He will give strength to endure."

The two went forward once more. They dared not abide in this part; for it was like a pit in Hell. At noonday the burning sands, the fearful sun seemed to make a fire of the body of the boy. Yet he would not yield and stumbled forward, groping with hands outstretched, the circle of sky whirling above him, the ground seeming to heave and rise in great billows beneath feet. There came an hour when he besought Heli to give him water as he sank down groaning and breathing heavily. Then the good man practised a deceit, giving him all that remained in the water bottle, even own share, declaring that there ~~is~~ ^{is} enough for the morrow. He dared not keep it beyond another sunrise, for without this measure of water Jesus might well perish or be overcome in the understanding and no more able to command himself.

It was with a failing heart that Heli rose as the eastern light gave him tidings of yet another day. He knew that if they did not encounter the Tribe of the Tinkers that the hours of Jesus were numbered.

CHAPTER L

Jesus stirred. Heli ran to his side. The lips of the youth were almost black, his eyes sunken,

his cheeks falling away.

A low whisper fell upon the beggar's hearing. "Hasten forward. Abide no more with me. I am a useless burden now. Save thyself before the fiery serpent of the skies devour thee also."

"Nay, I will not desert thee, son. A noble destiny is writ upon thy brow. The fiery serpent shall not suck thy life away, turn thy body into a ball of dust, casting thy tender soul in

great torment into Sheol." Heli stood up and his whole being shook with wrath as he thrust upwards his bare arm and fist, defying the sun that now was rising in the east. "By the living God I will wrest this child from thee. I swear by my crown that no hair of his head shall be touched, that he will escape whole from thy pitiless torture, from thy withering tongues of flame."

Many other wild curses were uttered by this hardy beggar. And he felt refreshed when he had thus emptied himself of his spleen and declared his defiance to the encroaching fires of the skies. But, in the stillness that followed, Jesus groaned, murmuring arid muttering: "The sky presseth down upon me, Heli. Heli, it is all darkness."

The beggar did not answer this feeble plaint, but went forward a little way, coming after a while to a clump of dried bushes which hid the distance from his view. Rounding them he came upon a sloping upland of soft sand, and gazing upon it his body suddenly trembled.

Small marks were shaped upon the ground. In places blown sand had buried the track, but there were sufficient signs of men's feet and of camels' hooves to cause Heli to go hardily forward. When the sun was high he came at last to a nose of gravel thrust upwards from the plain, and about it was a thicket that again hid the rim of earth and sky from his vision. It was not an hour to march beneath the devouring rays of light, and the tongue of the beggar changed to a purple hue as he stumbled on across that scorched waste. He would not tarry, for the fife of Jesus hung upon his last bold endeavour to search out the tribe who lived in the deeps of their desert home.

And now a sound broke across the wind stroked silence. A creature that was not man, stirred some way off and caused Heli to pause and consider, and then cast himself down beside a bush, pressing his ear to the earth.

Of a sudden cries beat upon the stillness like heavy blows. A troop of gazelles leaped from the thicket and sped down the slope, scattering east and west. He stretched himself out upon the earth as these beasts leaped past him, and there came the hum of whirring spears, the sound of bodies falling upon stones, and again the cries of hunters who are near to their prey.

Soon men ran by the beggar, laughing and making a merry clamour. They were blind to all save their stricken prey. So they might be observed and warily watched, and a little time passed by before Heli was at last assured that these hunters were not robbers, but his friends and comrades of the Tribe of the Wanderers.

Joyfully they greeted him. Swiftly they raised him upon their shoulders, and, at his bidding, bore northward towards the spot where Jesus lay perishing. "Hasten, hasten," cried the beggar; "he may already be gone hence."

"Yea, yea, we make our best speed," the wild men answered; and they leaped and ran forward like the little gazelles, neither yielding nor falling beneath the fearful rays of noon. They came speedily upon Jesus, and discovered that though he lay in a swoon, life still abode within him, his spirit had not passed. Tenderly, as if he were their own son, these hunters bore the lad home to their tents and gave him into the women's charge. For two days and nights his body was stricken; and after that time a sweet sleep fell upon him. And at last he awoke to peace and to the blue mantle of the glimmering desert darkness.

Now the Tribe of the Wanderers fear the thieves who travel in troops through Arabia. In those times, when their possessions increase, these desert wolves dog their steps, and in some seasons, have stolen every little cow and goat, the last ass in their possession, and even the tools of their trade, the very pots and hooks they have but lately shaped for the people of the villages. So in the month Heli sought them, being hard pressed, they had chosen to wander into those waterless ways which the robbers dare not penetrate; for they know that they would speedily perish from thirst. But the Tribe of the Wanderers is the elder desert folk and possesses a lore, that some even say, they have learned from the Ancient of Days. For it is a marvel of understanding of the hidden treasure in the sands.

Water is called 'the hidden treasure of the wilderness.' And only these Tinker men can find it in the waterless lands. Such is the name of that dry heart of Arabia which is the terror of robbers, travelers and of all beasts. For those alone, who know the desert lore, may dwell therein and not be turned into the dust that blows to and fro in every wind through its great silence.

"Verily, Heli," said Habnor, the chief of the Tribe, "Angels march beside thee, for only an angel could have guided thee to us in this, the noon of summer.



CHAPTER LI

Jesus came among this people as a stranger whose speech even was not shaped in the same manner as their own. They had, in past times, suffered much from the men of the towns who cheated them and scorned them if they made an exchange, selling ostrich feathers, pots and steels, and other handiwork of theirs. To them Jesus was one of the townsfolk, whom they despised and hated, yet they gave him honourable welcome. He was called 'God's wayfarer' and sat at the chief's board. Their food was poor and mean; but to God's wayfarer they served sweet butter, the choicest nourishment they could offer; and when he besought them to suffer him to eat only of their common food-dates and locust meat-they were much provoked. And Heli bade Jesus receive this gracious gift of theirs, saying: "Thou wilt shame them if thou wilt not partake of it." Wherefore Jesus obeyed, and in all things he sought to follow the counsel of the elder who, on the evening of the third day, drew him apart and declared the judgment of the Tribe.

'They harbour a guest for a week. After that time they fill his water bottles and give him as much provision as may be packed into his wallet, and then bid him depart in God's Name. But, if thou art proved to be of service and canst display skill of understanding or skill in their trade, then they may consent to harbour thee, and in due season make thee one of their Tribe. Now I would know thy desire on this matter. Even as one of their Tribe, thou art free to come and go and art not in any manner bound to them."

And Jesus answered: "I desire to dwell among them, to learn all they can teach me of life, and to serve them in return for the gifts they can offer me."

"Be it so then," Heli answered. "Only they demand much skill from the stranger or some rare gift of the soul. Howsoever, I am not afraid for thee, inasmuch as thine is a princely offering."

Now, because he had served in a workshop, the tinkers set Jesus the task of shaping a wooden saddle for a camel. The tools were rude and misshapen, and soon it was perceived that his labour would not serve, as no camel's back could have borne the saddle carved out of the rough wood by him. Therefore he was withdrawn from this labour and assisted for a while a smith who made axes for the herdsmen, so that they might hew off green boughs of the acacia as fodder for the cattle and kindling for the women's fires. But the smith also scorned the service offered by the lad; for there were others who were more skilful in the tribe. So the chief pronounced sentence. Jesus might not be one of them. Within seven days he must go hence, seeking the road again.

However, Jesus perceived that certain of the children and young men were blinded by the flies and the heat of the noonday sun. In company with Heli, he wandered to and fro in the barren waste, and they discovered certain herbs within a cleft on a dry mountain which, in its other parts, was as bare as a skeleton picked by the birds. And having gathered these herbs, Jesus brewed them in a pot on the fire, and then with their juices anointed the eyes of the afflicted people. And on the morrow there came scales upon these lids, and they having dropped away, the eyes became whole once again. It seemed a miracle to the sufferers. Hailing Jesus as their deliverer, they bore him on their shoulders into the presence of Habnor. And when the chief learned that twelve persons had been cured in this fashion by "the White Stranger" he hardened his heart, saying: "This is the work of Heli who hath instructed the lad in simples and herbs." And he refused to yield to the demands of the twelve that he should keep Jesus, making him a member of the Tribe.

Harsh seemed the judgment. But in summer food was scarce and water more precious than gold to the miser. Rare must be, therefore, the talent of the stranger who would abide with them.

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Now within the tent of Habnor sat an ancient whose beard and hair were white as the fleece of a cleansed sheep. And the deep lines upon his brow and countenance shewed his great age. At one time he had been comely but now his eyes were blind, and so he sat in darkness.

"Behold my father," said Habnor to Jesus. "He is curious concerning thee, so speak with

him while I go unto my people.

Jesus sat at the ancient's feet and listened to his strange voice that sounded like the rustle of wind in trees. This elder spoke with great freedom, asking so many questions, the lad's tongue was loosened. He had determined to remain silent in all matters that concerned the understanding and the Spirit because of the evil sayings of the people of Nazareth. But the gentleness of the old blind man drew speech from him; and soon he was telling tales of the husbandmen, the vineyards and olive groves of Galilee. And the Blind Man was greatly uplifted, and when his son, the chief, returned, said to him: "What wilt thou do with the White Stranger?"

"I shall send him to his own people; for he is not a skilled craftsman so cannot worthily serve our Tribe."

"Nay, it is my purpose to keep the lad by me," said the sage. "For he hath told golden tales to me, and hath, with the touch of his hands, instilled power and strength 'into my withered body. Verily, his speech is a marvel, so I would have him as my servant."

Desiring to please his father, Habnor consented, and Jesus dwelt in the tent of the chief.

In time he came to know the strangeness of these desert folk, their sins and their virtues; and these were not like the sins and virtues of the people of the town. When wildness came upon them they fought and beat each other, and one night Jesus perceived the smith menacing with a spear a thief who had stolen his bread. In his anger he slew the man, and in the after time, was not made accountable for the deed, as he was a skilled craftsman, and Habnor knew that what possessions they could buy from the folk of the villages must be paid for by the work in steel, hooks, spears and axes, designed by this man. So he went scathless, though he was as Cain, having slain his kinsman.

On those nights that followed the days the Tribe rested from their journeys, the people made music and leaped to and fro in answer to its melody, and sometimes they entered into a frenzy, and wild became their shouting, strange the steps of the dance. Then certain of the men would lust after the women; and Jesus perceived wickedness such as he had never known in Galilee. But, despite their rude and, at times, sinful ways, there was no malice in these desert folk; they uttered no base sayings, and they were gentle with  Jesus, praising and acclaiming him. For never had they known a chronicler like the  White Stranger, they declared. And the women and the children loved him because he cured their sickness, and spoke softly to them.

CHAPTER LII

Now the Tribe of the Tinkers was of the stock of Israel; but the Jews held them in disfavour and called them outcasts. For they lived in a free manner that, in certain ways, was unclean in their eyes; as they did not observe the outward rites and ceremonies laid down by Moses.

The Blind Man opened his heart to Jesus on these matters, saying: "I was born in Jerusalem and am by race and breeding a Pharisee. Wherefore, I grieve because it seems that these children of the desert are lost; they keep neither the feast days nor the fasts, neither do they pray, nor cleanse their bodies according to the Law of Moses."

Jesus answered: "Master, grieve not. The inward grace cometh first with God; the outward signs come last. These folk neither fast nor offer up long prayers nor sacrifices. Yet I have known great charity among them and a noble vision, a desire to repent, a humbleness of heart which is not the share of many a proud Pharisee who dwelleth at Jerusalem, nor is it the possession of a certain Scribe and certain devout persons I have known in Galilee."

And the Blind Man said: "I am cut off by reason of my sightlessness from knowledge of the doings of our people. Howbeit, Habnor telleth me that much evil is wrought by them when

their blood is hot and they are roused by their desires to hate and to lust."

"Yea, there is evil of a kind in this camp," said Jesus. "But I tell thee thou wilt find the noble vision also among the people. Hearken. There were two men, who fell at strife, when first I came among ye. And these two wounded one another with knives in their heat and wrath. So, from that hour they were enemies and could give no thought but to their hate

and to the ways whereby they could do hurt to one another. And I said to them: 'Love your enemies, bless them that seek to do ye evil; and thus will ye find favour with your chief Habnor and with God.' They made no answer. Darkness overspread their countenances and they turned their faces from me. And behold, at noon one day, as we halted after a long and weary march, the first man laid down and slept, and the second man stole, what in that hour was beyond price of gold, the waterbottle of the sleeper. And he waked to perceive the other drinking the last drop of spring water from it. He said no word, but when evening came he seated himself before the second man and presented him with a share of his bread and dates. The second man had little to eat, so seized and devoured this offering; and when he had finished, laughed: 'Thou art a fool and a coward,' and striking the first man, snatched his mantle from him.

"This brother raised no hand to smite the thief, but smiled scornfully and laid down to rest. And the cold that cometh with the night smote this man, who was naked but for his loin cloth; and in the morning he waked in a fever. Then certain of the Tribe gathered about the second man, crying: 'Shame, shame, what hast thou done in bringing such ill upon this brother of ours?' And they set words of contempt upon him that broke his anger and his hate. Wherefore, he went unto the first brother, gave him of his water and food and cherished him through the clays of sickness that followed. Now these two enemies love one another, and where they go among thy people there is peace.

"Now, master, tell me, in the clay of judgment will these two outcasts be condemned because they observed not fast days and feasts in their lives and made no long prayers? And will a Scribe I know, in that last day, find favour with God through having faithfully observed the rites and ceremonies of Moses, but sinned in charity of speech and thought, hating and despitefully using those who were not of his kind?"

"The two outcasts of the desert will be set before this Scribe in that last day," said the Blind Man; and he smiled upon Jesus, murmuring: "Great is thy discernment. And verily, I desire to know thy true name and thy destiny. It may be that thou art one of the old prophets raised from the grave to be a light to Israel in these troubrous days."

Jesus did not answer his master. He wrote upon the sand with his stick; but no man who was present and who had hearkened could read that name or interpret the sign.

I was the secret word which signifies Christ. No man has written that word, and those of **THE** disciples who saw it in the after time, would not utter it or guard it even in their remembrance; for they were afraid.

CHAPTER LIII

At the end of summer the desert robbers made an assault upon the Tribe. Many were wounded, two or three slain; and they were despoiled of their cattle and their camels. There followed a season of dearth, and the weak and ailing perished from hunger. But, in that time of need, all shared equally in raiment, food and drink.

Setting up their tents near a town on the borders of the wilderness, the tinkers laboured at their trade, those who were whole making pots and pans which they sold to the townsmen; and for a time they hired themselves to these folk. So when spring came again they might go once more into the wastes of Arabia, and they were glad; for the desert was their true home.

The Blind Man communed with Jesus, opening his heart to him, declaring his great sorrow. "For a generation darkness hath encompassed me about; and oft times my spirit bath fainted in this loneliness, and I have doubted God. I ask myself whether He can be loving if He thus afflicted me. And I cannot even now in my age resign myself to this blindness which shutteth out what was ever a delight to me-sunrise and sunset, the colours of the wilderness, the brave shapes of men, the loveliness of women, the joys of

labour and swift enterprise, the delights of love and laughter. All pleasure, all abundance of life have been denied to me by reason of mine affliction, and so I have come to doubt the mercy of my Maker and to believe that He is a cruel God."

Jesus reasoned with the Blind man, but could not overcome this melancholy. So, in that season, he drew himself apart and prayed much alone, also he fasted. For now had come the time of preparation for the summoning of the healing Spirit again. He had not since

that baleful hour at the place of the Gathering uttered the Name, "my Heavenly Father," in the hearing of any man. And he still kept secret this knowledge of the Father. But he communed with Him, saying aloud: "My Father" in those hours he was alone and hid by some great rock in a valley of sand, or when he was high upon the breast of a black mountain smooth and bare of all green things.

.....

One evening Heli followed Jesus and watched him from behind a rock. In a little while he heard voices and perceived that where there had been one there were now two shapes. They walked to and fro; and the beggar listened eagerly, but could not interpret the murmur of their speech which was borne to him on the warm breeze.

After a time Jesus broke from his companion, moving swiftly down the slope. And the last rays of the sun played about the stranger till he seemed to pass into them and to lose shape, becoming that light.

Now Heli was not a man of foolish imaginations. But it may be that the changing hues of that evening hour beguiled his understanding. For he swore upon oath in the after time that the body of Jesus gave out a radiance like the beams of a star, and he seemed rapt in his own vision. He did not heed the cries of the beggar, hastening ever downwards, speeding towards the tents of the Tinker Tribe that now lay in the red glow of the setting sun, dark and thick with life.

Heli ran after the youth; and he passed by the fires fit by the women, scattering them, so great was his trouble because of that strangeness in Jesus. Not even the smith could stay his wild flight. He did not halt until he stood within the dim house of clay that had been built for the chief. And Jesus was whispering softly therein and taking the Blind Man by the hand; and again it seemed to Heli that this dusky chamber was illumined by the starry wonder and no hole or corner remained in darkness. Then again his wandering, amazed mind was held by the sight of the Blind Man.

Thrice Jesus touched his eyeballs, thrice he spoke words of sharp command. "Open and gaze upon the people who are dear to thee, upon the earth thou lovest."

The youth led the Blind Man to the door of that clay dwelling; and, at the third command, he raised his lids, and then gave a great cry that silenced the murmuring of the people gathered about their fires.

All these gazed at the ancient, whom they revered; and they stood up in his presence as, with hands outstretched, he came forward among them, saying: "My children, I see again. This youth of Galilee laid his fingers upon my brow; and behold, in an instant, mine eyes were made whole."

Then there was great rejoicing, the Blind Man going from one elder in the Tribe to another, speaking to each one, naming the colour of his robe, of his eyes, and declaring the size of the shapes about him: so that the chief, who had at first doubted, was compelled to believe that Jesus had given his father back his sight.

And far into that blue night the people danced and sang, making a feast to shew their joy at this miracle; and for the first time they hailed Jesus as brother, embracing him, calling him one of their own.

When at last the lad laid down to sleep Heli went to him and questioned him. "A stranger stood with thee upon the black mountain. Name him to me, I pray thee."

"Nay, I may not declare his title."

 But tell me how I may seek that radiant being and find him."

"Seek and ye shall find," Jesus answered; and then cried: O Heli, sorrow hath fled away as the shadows from the hills. Verily, life in abundance, joy in abundance are mine in this hour. And with this life and joy, hath come the peace that passeth man's understanding."

CHAPTER LIV

The Blind Man rose up while the stars were fading. Moving softly past his sleeping son, he went out into the camp. No man stirred; for it was the hour of deep slumber. Even the two guards, who kept the watch, drowsed by their dying fire. And the old man found his road with ease, stepping lightly between the huddled shapes of the sleepers, discovering Jesus at last.

He bent down, whispering his name in his ear, bidding him rise up and follow. And these two passed silently as shapes of mist from that gathering, and they went forward through the stillness of the desert, climbing upwards and along the slope of the black mountain.

When all the east shone with light the old man halted, turning his face towards it, crying out his thanks to his Maker because, after a score of years, the windows of his house were opened; his eyes again perceived the glory of the sunrise.

"I doubt no more. I worship. I bow down before Thee, O Holy and Ineffable One," he cried. "And even if death cometh now in this hour of my joy I shall go without complaint, in gladness, because in Thy great mercy Thou hast suffered me to see once again the hills and the valleys, men and women's faces, and the countenance and shape of my firstborn in all his beauty. Verily, I shall go down in faith, peace and gladness into the grave,

After these words were spoken silence gathered about the youth and the ancient. Awe possessed them as they watched the fiery east breaking out, bursting forth in colour like some mighty flower, kindling all the heavens with light. Suddenly he, who had been blind, turned to Jesus, saying: "Name thyself to me."

"Thou knowest my name, Jesus of Nazareth."

"Jesus of Nazareth, yea; Jesus who will be the Messiah."

As the old man spoke these words the countenance of the young Galilean changed and darkened.

"Nay, not so ... not yet," the lad cried out woefully, and his body was shaken by his trouble as he turned his face to the light. But, after a while, peace came again as he muttered: "Thy Will, not mine be done."

THE END



